

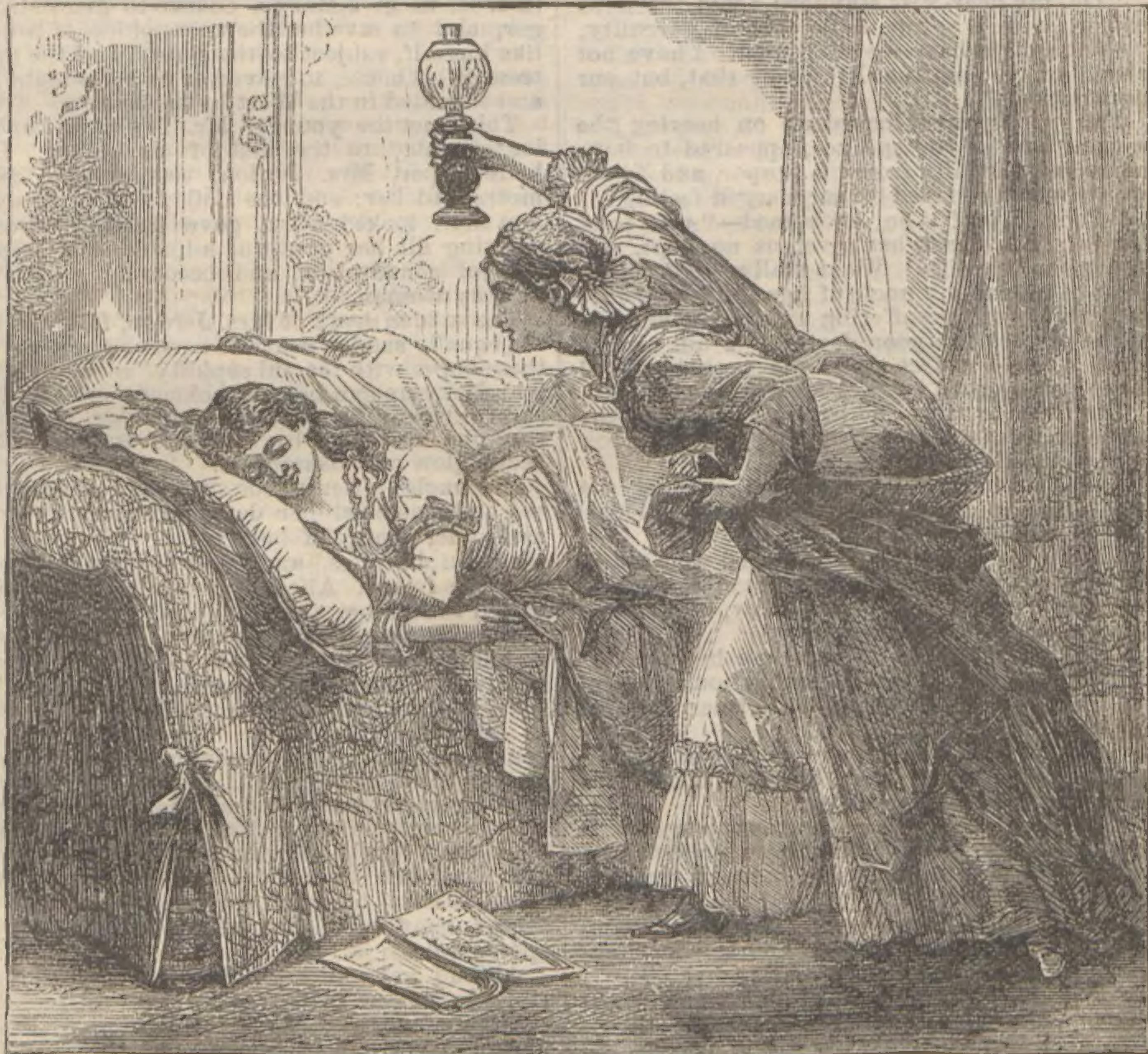
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SHE GAZED LONG AND EARNESTLY UPON THE SLUMBERING GIRL.

A PERILOUS PLEDGE; Or, MAD FOR LOVE. BY GEORGIANA DICKENS.

CHAPTER I.

A DEATH-BED PROMISE.

It was on a summer's evening that a strange

and touching picture presented itself in a room of one of the best hotels in Buffalo. Seated in an attitude of the deepest dejection was a young and handsome man of gentlemanly appearance. Near him stood a girl in the first bloom of womanhood. She was of medium height, of fair hair and complexion, and had a simple, gentle look upon her that spoke of nobility of person and tenderness of heart. She had very regular features, and, although

not bewildering in her beauty, it was impossible, in gazing at her, not to feel an attraction begotten of deep sympathy and admiration. She was weeping bitterly, and vainly strove to repress the sobs which seemed to convulse her whole being.

Not a word was spoken between the two, and whatever the bond of grief may have been, it was apparently, at the moment, too deep for words. The entrance into the room of a motherly-looking woman attracted the eager attention of both, and although no question arose upon either of their lips, the almost painful interrogation of their eyes was eloquent of excited interest.

"Oh, my dear Miss Maynard," said the newcomer, with a sympathetic sort of garrulity, "what a night have we not passed! I have not closed an eye; not that I think of that, but our dear patient!"

The young man looked up on hearing the earnest tones of the speaker, appeared to have recovered partially from his stupor, and found words which relieved his surcharged feelings.

"Poor Mary!" he exclaimed—"my poor cousin! The doctor has given us no hope. So young! so beautiful! What shall we do? Ought I not to inform my uncle of her sad state? He little thinks of the suffering we now undergo—of the peril of our poor darling! I am almost mad when I reflect upon the probable end! Have you no good news, Mrs. Harmond?"

The woman thus addressed, who was the nurse engaged at the doctor's suggestion, shook her head sadly in reply.

Alice, mastering her emotion as best she could, then spoke: "What does the doctor say this morning?"

"Not a word, miss; but he looked very sad as he went out, as though he had lost all hope; and for the last few hours, you know, he has not given us any encouragement."

"Oh, it is really dreadful to lose her thus, at the very moment of her returning home!" And the speaker again sunk into his former state of reverie.

"Cannot we go into the room, nurse? It will not excite her, I am sure. We shall both be as quiet and composed as we can be."

"Well, miss, I will go and see how she is first. It would be very wrong to prevent the poor young lady from seeing both of you, but I'll go at once and see."

Mrs. Harmond stole softly from the room into the one adjoining; nor was she long absent.

"Poor Miss Taylor is very quiet now," said she, in a low voice, "and she has asked to see you, Miss Maynard, and her cousin also."

"Let us go!" said the young man, as, supporting Alice, he and she followed the nurse, who remained in the ante-room.

The invalid, whose state of health so seriously and justly alarmed the fears of the persons who have been named, was the only daughter of a rich and much-respected New York merchant, Mr. James Taylor, senior member of the firm Taylor, Jewetson, and Co., wholesale linen dealers.

Mary Taylor, who had lost her mother many years ago, had been brought up, owing to her delicate health, with which the Eastern climate did not agree, by an uncle residing on the California coast.

The gentleman had been at one time a junior member of her father's firm, and managed the San Francisco branch of the business; in which city for one or two years after the loss of his wife, Mary's father resided, and where he met and married his second wife, a lady of great personal attractions, put with a despotic will.

Mr. Taylor's life, after his second marriage, proved anything but happy; and he determined, in order to give Mary a chance to grow stronger, and to save her the unhappiness of being, like himself, subject to the tyranny of the mistress of his house, to leave her to be brought up and educated in the West by his brother.

This trust the younger Mr. Taylor, a bachelor, executed to the best of his ability. His housekeeper, Mrs. Jerdon, was as kind as a mother to her; and the child, well nourished and well looked after, gave promise of outgrowing all her youthful ailments and weakness of constitution, and becoming a strong, healthy woman.

The sudden death of Mrs. Jerdon, followed by the equally sudden death of her uncle, destroyed these hopes with fearful rapidity, and the shock laid Mary upon a bed of sickness, undoing the careful work of years, and replacing the once rosy hue of health by the false and deceitful glow of consumption.

Her uncle's friends, too surely foreseeing the sad end, hastened her departure from California, under charge of her cousin, who had gone there on business, and accompanied by her dearest friend, Alice Maynard, an orphan, forced to seek her own livelihood.

Miss Maynard, happy to be of service to her friend, and without ties to bind her to the West, gladly accepted the responsibility, knowing that the East and West were alike to one forced to labor for her living. The trip across the continent had proved a particularly enjoyable one, and the hopes of Alice and her friend's cousin revived so much that they did not deem it necessary to inform Mr. Taylor of the state of Mary's health, since their departure from San Francisco had been so hurried that nothing more than a telegraphic message had been sent, announcing his brother's death and Mary's speedy return.

All had gone successfully until they reached Chicago, when owing to having to make a change of cars in the night, during a violent storm, Mary took a severe cold which settled on her lungs, and grew worse so rapidly that when they reached Buffalo they were compelled to forego the remainder of the journey and remove her to a hotel until she should recover sufficiently to resume her travels.

In the mean time, in order that her father should not be alarmed they telegraphed him that they had decided to stop over for a few days to get rested and take a trip to the falls.

Mr. Taylor, not having seen Mary for so many years was naturally anxious to clasp her in his arms, but, fearing his wife's reception of

her, was very glad to hear that they would not reach home as soon as he had expected, as it would give him time to prepare her step-mother for Mary's coming, and insure for her, if possible a cordial, or at any rate, a polite greeting.

Each day the little party had hoped that Mary would be sufficiently recovered to resume her journey, and it was therefore with inexpressible alarm that her cousin saw her sinking condition, and heard the doctor's sad words of misgiving. As he had forborne to send a letter which he had written when Mary was so evidently worse, he now saw himself placed in a terrible position of responsibility.

He was the son of Mr. Taylor's second sister, and had been educated for a mercantile career for the avowed purpose of ultimately becoming a partner in his uncle's house.

With a strong sense of duty, Phillip Rosston (such was his name) had a sincere regard for his uncle, whose kindness had been unvarying, and to this feeling was added an attachment toward Mary. Pity, more than love, was the real feeling he entertained toward her, although he believed that the more powerful passion was paramount.

It is no uncommon thing to entertain such a delusion. Our sympathies are enlisted for the suffering, especially when borne with uncomplaining courage and resignation, and the object not unfrequently appears to be the sole one which responds to love, whereas it is the mind, and not the heart, which is enthralled.

Firm, however, in the belief that he loved Mary, and was in turn beloved by her, he had confessed it to her; and she, too grateful for kind comiseration, and weak in body, yet calm in intellect, had permitted, if not encouraged, his respectful homage, fearful by any word or act of causing him unhappiness, although perfectly aware how vain his hopes would prove. Perhaps with the prescience of one whose steps were turned from earth, the devotion of a strong and healthy being was not devoid of consolation and peace.

In a large easy-chair, which had been turned toward the window, through which the rays of the setting sun fell with a rare and beauteous glow, the poor invalid reclined.

She seemed, sitting thus, almost rosy in health. It was, however, the redness of that insidious disease, which, having laid its clammy hand upon its victim, sent a false hectic beacon flashing o'er the sunken cheek, the more cruelly to mask its fell progress.

Mary's lips were parted as if she were speaking, although she uttered no word; while her eyes, bright and sparkling by the same falsehood of disease, seemed looking into the future, not sadly, but hopefully; not despairingly, but with the calm, bright courage of a noble nature. What visions she saw, how far the portals of an unknown world were opened to her gaze, none can tell.

Nothing, however, seemed to pain the breast of this gentle girl, for a smile of radiant happiness wreathed itself upon her lips, and she nodded her head softly, as if to confirm a thought, or answer some question that had arisen in her mind.

Alice and Phillip, entering on tip-toe, stood spellbound at the sight. A gentle pressure of Phillip's hand restrained his companion from advancing. The caution was, however, needless; for the invalid, with that preternatural delicacy of sense peculiar to the sick, had heard their entrance, and with a motion of her thin hand summoned them to her side.

Phillip quietly and noiselessly fell upon his knees before her, while Alice, placing her hand very gently on Mary's head, smoothed her hair and kissed her forehead. For some moments the grouping was unchanged, and a strange thought would have passed through the mind of any casual looker-on, had the picture commanded, as it could scarcely fail to have done, his earnest attention.

This was the remarkable resemblance which appeared between the two girls. They were, apart, most unlike each other; and yet together, and inseparable through affection, a similarity of expression and general character became astonishingly evident.

No reason could be assigned for this, for indeed none but that of a physiological nature existed.

Both girls were fair, both had blue eyes, and they were of almost the same age; beyond this the likeness did not go, yet they were alike when near each other, although Alice was taller than Mary.

Phillip, mastering his agitation, spoke in a tolerably firm voice.

"You appear much stronger, Mary, than when I saw you yesterday. You will soon regain your health."

"Oh, yes," answered Mary, in a low, sweet voice, tinged with deepest melancholy, "I suffer less than I did, and—very soon I shall be free from all suffering."

"You say that very sadly, dear Mary," replied Alice. "We shall be very glad when you are free from pain."

"Alice!—oh, pray believe me, darling!—it is for you that I suffer now."

"For me?" exclaimed her friend in astonishment—"for me? If you were well I should be free from all care, and as happy as the day is long."

"Thanks, oh, thanks!" And the invalid drew her friend toward her bosom, and pressed her thin and wasted arms around her neck.

For a short time that position was unchanged, and it was Mary now who, with gentle kindness, smoothed the hair over Alice's brow and kissed her cheeks. Then, as if fatigued even with this slight exertion, she ceased, and Alice crouched on a low footstool at her side, and put her head on Mary's bosom.

"Alas!" thought the invalid: "she does not understand me! But, perhaps, all is for the best." Then, in a voice, which was almost firm, she addressed her friend:—"Poor Alice, what will you do, alone in the world, in a new part of the country, without relations or friends?"

"Are you not more to me than either?"

"But you must not reckon upon me," murmured Mary, with a gentle sigh.

"How cruel of you, darling, to talk in that way!" said Alice, scarcely able to command her voice or to restrain her tears.

"And do not forget, Mary, that I am to be counted on; nor you either, Alice. You must not overlook my existence."

There was a gentle insistence in Phillip's voice, which seemed very grateful to the invalid, for she smiled and pressed his hand when he had spoken.

"Oh, yes," she said; "we must not forget Phillip. Remember, cousin, what you have just said. Promise that you will be her guardian, her cousin, her brother, and that you will never—never abandon her!"

Her appeal was earnest and touching, and Phillip, moved deeply by it, exclaimed:

"Dear Mary, I give you my word. I swear never to desert Alice, come weal, come woe!"

The poor girl smiled sweetly at her cousin's warmth of reply.

"Now, tell me, cousin," continued Mary, "have you written to papa?" And two large tears rose to her eyes as she pressed her hand upon her heart.

"I wrote a few hurried lines the day we reached here, and then I received his letter telling us not to hurry our trip on his account."

"In your letter did you say anything about Alice?"

"No; I wrote so hastily that I gave him no news, not deeming it wise to alarm him about you. It is well I did not tell him how ill you had been, now that you are so much better."

A tremor shook Mary's frame at her cousin's words, and she was glad of the entrance of the nurse, Mrs. Harmond, who quietly and thoughtfully handed her a glass of some reviving cordial.

She drank a little, and then telling her that she wanted to speak to her cousin and Alice, Mrs. Harmond left the room as noiselessly as she had entered it.

"Well, cousin," said Mary, "what about the second letter?"

"I have just finished it, but delayed sending it until I had seen the doctor. Uncle would naturally be anxious to hear how you were getting on, and when we intend to start for New York."

"Show me that letter, cousin."

Alice whispered to him:

"No, no; do not let her see it."

But the quick hearing of the invalid caught the words.

"Ah, you cruel girl! Don't you know that I have sharp ears?"

"I assure you, Mary, that it is not necessary for you to see the letter. It might upset you, and in your weak state we must have no undue excitement. Believe me, it is for the best."

But he spoke vainly, as, gently taking it from his hand—for he had instinctively drawn it out of his pocket—Mary by an effort raised herself slightly from her pillows, opened the missive with trembling fingers, and gently putting aside her cousin's hand, in a low voice read the following:

"Our dear Mary is in great danger." ("Poor fellow, what it must have cost him to write that!") "I dare not tell you yet to hope." ("No; that must not be.") "But we are happy in the possession of a dear, kind, compassionate friend, whose goodness and whose attentive solicitude have com-

forted us very greatly. Dear Mary is strongly attached to her—"

She suddenly ceased reading, and paused a few seconds, as if in thought, then hastily scanning the rest of the letter, quietly tore it into minute fragments which she threw upon the floor.

Phillip and Alice who had watched her with intense interest, were powerless to arrest the destruction of the letter, so quickly and decidedly had it been accomplished.

"Mary, what have you done?" asked her cousin, when he could find words to express his astonishment.

"I have torn up one letter, but I will dictate another, which I wish you to send."

"What can you mean?" a suspicion crossing his mind that Mary's bodily ailments had affected her intellect.

"Besides, dear," said Alice, "remember that the doctor imposed perfect quiet upon you. To attempt to dictate a letter in your present weak state might be attended with very grave consequences."

"It would give me so much pleasure. Do not deny me, if you love me!"

Her voice trembled, and she looked so imploringly at her cousin and at Alice, that they had not the heart to refuse her.

So Phillip rose from the feet of the invalid, where till now he had been kneeling, and whispered to Alice as he drew near the table where Mary's desk lay:

"It is the passing fancy of the sick; let us not deny her."

After he had seated himself, and had prepared the writing materials, he turned with affected gayety, saying:

"The scribe is ready; let him hear and perpetuate the words of wisdom falling from your lips."

Mary pressed her hand upon her forehead as if to collect her thoughts, and then, in a low, distinct voice, dictated to Phillip, who faithfully wrote what she said:

"DEAR UNCLE:—Having finished our sight-seeing, we are about prepared to resume our journey—"

Alice uttered an exclamation of surprise, which Phillip checked by a motion of his hand as his cousin continued:

"In another week, I trust you will hold your daughter in your arms."

"This is indeed a joyful surprise," said her cousin.

"Go on, dear Phillip; do not stop until the letter is finished."

Her voice grew suddenly faint, and it was some minutes before the spasm of pain which oppressed her had passed. Phillip and Alice were much alarmed, but at length she seemed to collect her force, and motioning to her cousin to resume his seat, she continued, in a low voice, her dictation:

"I need not say how glad I know you will be to see her—"

But again she paused, and turning piteously to her cousin, made a sign for him to come quickly to her side, and to bring Alice near her also; and they lost no time in obeying her.

When on either side, they bent over with anxious solicitude. She grasped Phillip's right hand within her own, and taking Alice's placed it in that of her cousin and held both with hers, while her voice, now very weak, could only be heard by the two anxious listeners bending closely toward her.

"Listen, Phillip; the moments are precious; already my voice fails me. Phillip, I wish—I wish—I insist—I implore that Alice shall assume my place within your heart, and take my place in our family!"

"Mary, Mary, say no more!" tearfully ejaculated Alice.

The almost speechless girl continued in a whisper:

"Listen, both of you. I give her my fortune and my name. I bequeath both to her. It is my last wish upon earth!" She paused in exhaustion, but resolute to accomplish her purpose, mustered her forces to conclude her strange desire. "I wish my dear father to look upon and receive Alice as his own child. She must bear my name—be my other self. Swear, Phillip, to do this—respect my dying wish!"

"Dying!" he groaned, as in agony. He gazed upon his cousin. An imploring look in her eyes could not be resisted, for after an instant's pause, he added: "Mary, I swear to fulfill your wish!"

"And you, Alice—oh, my darling Alice, hold me to your heart! I am cold—my eyesight fails me—give me your hand, and yours, Phillip. Alice, sister,"—and the poor, weary head sunk heavily upon the terrified girl's shoulder—"you cannot refuse me—you cannot pain the heart which loves you so dearly at the very moment it has almost ceased to beat!"

Alice, in an agony of terror, whispered in Mary's ear:

"No, no, darling; whatever you wish shall be done. Oh, Heaven! why cannot I give up my life to save yours?"

Mary, by some strange effort, seemed, on Alice's promise, to recover a little power, for her voice, though still low, was not broken or faltering.

"That is very good of you—so good! I am happy now—so happy! Thus, your dear faces near me—united by me, never to be parted! I bless you both! Remember, Phillip, what I have said; and, Alice, do not forget! Bless you—bless—"

And with a prayer of blessing on her lips, Mary laid her head more closely to the bosom of her friend, and, still clasping Phillip's hand, passed away from this world, to be forever at rest.

CHAPTER II.

A MODERN COUPLE.

MR. TAYLOR'S residence in New York was neither on Fifth avenue or any of the adjoining fashionable avenues, but on Twenty-third street, in a locality which, while it had once been the bight of aristocracy to own a house in "London Terrace," had long since been abandoned to boarding-houses and residences of the non-fashionables, to whom comfort was the chief consideration.

To this class belonged Mr. Taylor, and if his wife had a grievance—and she did have many—the pertinacity of her husband in continuing to reside in this no longer fashionable locality was the greatest.

The precise merchant very frequently yielded to his wife's remonstrances or commands (they were very much alike, by the way), but when a change of domicile was canvassed by her, as very frequently happened, he positively refused to listen, and pertinaciously declined to give any reason for his unalterable affection for the house in which he had passed the greater, and also the happiest, portion of his life with Mary's mother.

Mrs. Taylor, prompted by visits of ultra-fashionable friends, had periodic attacks of detestation for her residence, and, as she was always met on this particular matter by her husband's resolute demeanor, her anger attained a height utterly disproportionate to the question.

It was just at the time of his daughter's expected arrival from California that Mrs. Taylor, for perhaps the twentieth time, was expostulating with her husband on the folly, the obstinacy, of continuing to reside in so undignified a locality.

The much-vexed merchant, determined never to give way to his wife's wishes on this point, appreciated the difficulty he would encounter if he spoke of his daughter's advent in New York, and like a weak man, as he was in many things, put off the announcement and the arrival, hoping that Mrs. Taylor would soon recover her equanimity.

Hence the word he sent to his nephew at Buffalo, little conscious of the possibly sad termination of a journey he had followed, in imagination, with great interest and much impatience.

He had no knowledge of how his daughter looked, as he had not seen her since she was a little child just able to walk and talk; but his heart was full of projects for her happiness.

He had no knowledge either of her friends or acquaintances, nor did he, indeed, know much about his deceased brother.

They had been attached to each other when boys, and later, when both were young men, the same good brotherly feeling existed.

The cares and anxieties of a business life are, however, very apt to blunt such kindly feeling, and almost certainly preclude its utterance; so that beyond the usual cold commercial correspondence, very few letters passed between the brothers.

Mr. Taylor, through a pardonable weakness, originating in a desire to live at peace, forbore to do more than mention to his wife his brother's death, with a passing remark that the proper place for Mary now would be her father's house.

The response to this communication was so exceedingly cold that Mr. Taylor did not renew the conversation.

He now perceived, however, that if his daughter was to become a resident in his house, he must take a decisive stand—ignorant, poor man, of the tragic end of the watched-for journey.

After turning the matter over in his mind, he

determined to write to Phillip to tell him to bring Mary home, and in the mean time suggested, and finally persuaded his wife not to allow the season to terminate without giving a dinner-party, with a ball to follow.

This ingenious but expensive idea fell upon Mrs. Taylor's ears with wonder; but as it gratified a wish she had already formed, she adopted it, but was careful not to betray the fact that it was according to her desires.

Mr. Taylor, pleased to find that he had gained his wife's good-will, set about the preparation for the festivities, very greatly aided by his partner, Mr. Jewetson, a middle-aged fop, whose only interest in the firm consisted in what he annually drew from the concern where he had invested his small capital, which, by the judicious management of Mr. Taylor, yielded enough to enable this obscure member of society to lead an easy club life, and to talk largely about affairs in the city, as if he were a veritable Rothschild.

The father, under the dominion of a second wife, was thus seen preparing festivities for the return of a daughter who not long before had been laid in her grave, away from home, yet mourned sincerely by a cousin and a friend.

CHAPTER III.

ALICE MAYNARD'S PAST.

PHILLIP ROSSTON was half-crazed with apprehension when he realized the promise he had made to the dying girl, and would have shrunk from its fulfillment had not her solemn adjuration constantly haunted him. He seemed always to hear her sad entreaty; he repeated his own oath to obey her wish as an excuse whenever he thought of what he had promised to do, and of its accomplishment. His was a firm and steadfast nature, however, and he would not even to himself admit the possibility of evading his obligation to the dead. Moreover, he argued within himself that, in fulfilling his oath, he injured no one, but signally served a woman whom he regarded as second only to his lost Mary.

This feeling of admiration for Alice, and the sophistical reasoning that he would be serving her worldly interests, grew stronger as he felt that she possessed every day a greater hold upon his imagination. He argued also that his uncle, to whom Mary was so little known, could not fail to be deeply interested in Alice, and, believing her to be his daughter, would lavish on her all the affectionate tenderness which Mary, had she lived, would have received.

And, in addition to all this, was the fact—which, if he realized, he did not admit—that he was already in love with Alice Maynard.

Yes, the gentle spirit of Mary seemed to have brought about this feeling, and Alice herself had fallen under the same benign influence, for Phillip Rosston was in her eyes the man of all men whom she could, and whom she did, love.

The decisive moment at length arrived. Mr. Taylor having gained, or rather secured, his wife's silence, wrote to Phillip to hurry home.

Poor Alice suffered the severest agony upon the arrival of this letter, and very seriously alarmed Phillip by her sudden indisposition.

She had passed through so many exciting scenes since her departure from Chicago, that she was but ill prepared to commence a difficult and arduous assumption like that which her dead friend had imposed upon her.

Hers was a peculiar and romantic life. From childhood she had known none but strangers. After the War of the Rebellion she had lived with an old farmer and his wife in the northern part of Missouri. They were very homely, simple folk, but kind and charitable in every way. For some years Alice almost ran wild in this western home of hers. She could ride a bridleless horse without a saddle, could fire a rifle and paddle a dug-out.

It was lucky for Alice that when she was still young she attracted the attention of a traveling naturalist, who was then compiling a book concerning the Fauna and Flora of Missouri.

His introduction to the maiden was accomplished in rather a startling manner.

Intent upon examining a beautiful specimen of one of the wild flowers so abundant in the forest, he had stretched himself at full length among the ferns, when he was startled from his scientific pursuits by the whizzing of a bullet close to the rim of his spectacles, and by the leap into the air of a rabbit in its death-throes close to his shoulder. This dramatic incident in the professor's life was accentuated by hearing a merry laugh at the result of the shot, and by perceiving on the bank immediately above a childlike creature grasping a small rifle, the barrel of which still emitted smoke.

If he was thunderstruck the girl seemed paralyzed on perceiving him. The laugh instantly ceased, the large blue eyes became distended in amazement, and the mouth, in a sympathy of surprise, opened and revealed a set of pearly teeth.

The situation was entirely changed when the child began to laugh with the most joyous hilarity, provoked by the professor's expression of countenance; and so contagious was this burst of merriment, that the savant sat up, and joined in it with all his heart.

Then, rising, he presented the victor with her spoils, in the shape of the rabbit, and after many questionings, discovered her name, her residence, and just as much of her life as aided him very quickly to fill up all the blanks with tolerable accuracy.

This professor, of German origin, as his name—Van Oppen—indicated, was not only a clever scientist and a lover of his chosen pursuits, but he was a man with a full and expansive heart, who loved his own species, so that Miss Alice Maynard's ingenuous air and manner won his heart, and he resolved to adopt her. He deemed it a shame that such a beautiful specimen of Nature's handiwork, with such a quick, bright intelligence, should grow up so like one of the wild flowers by the wayside.

At his request, Alice took the professor to her home, and there introduced him to the worthy farmer and his wife; and it may be very much questioned whether the learned man regarded the child with more wonderment than she, who knew no more of the world than the prairie showed her, regarded him.

The intuitive bonds of union, those of protec-

tion by him and gratitude by her, soon convinced Alice that she had made a happy exchange from the guardianship of the kindly, rough farmer to the pleasant, highly-cultured man of science.

Professor Van Oppen, having duly obtained the consent of her only friends, took her without delay to St. Louis, placed her in the best school in the city, and commanded that no expense or trouble might be spared in her education—all of which instructions were implicitly followed by Mrs. Silsbee, the bright Yankee schoolmistress domiciled in that ultra-Southern city on the Mississippi.

Alice did not take to mental exercises and educational calisthenics with the same ardor that she had followed the chase or her meanderings amid Nature's haunts; but she was too bright, too honest, to neglect any means by which she might make up for the lost years in an educational sense.

In nine years from the date of her entrance into the St. Louis Scholastic Institute it would have been impossible to recognize in the handsome, self-possessed and graceful Alice Maynard, the wild, bonny child who had shot the rabbit over the professor's spectacles on the Missouri prairie. But her heart was the same—open, generous and true—and she had made friends with every one.

At this time a sad event occurred, which cast a gloom over her hitherto joyous spirits.

Worthy Professor Van Oppen, in the too arduous study of certain lichens, took cold. He neglected his physician's advice to lay up, but went wandering off, exposed to fresh dangers of the same kind. Truth to say, the society of Mrs. Van Oppen was not so genial to the worthy professor as was a new fungi, or a particularly fine specimen of the rattlesnake; for the one might be edible and the other might be annihilated; but with Mrs. Van Oppen nothing of either kind could be accomplished. This lady, very much the professor's junior, was a Canadian by birth, who lived for pleasure alone, and was in reality jealous of Alice. Being so, she tried, but in vain, to make the professor alter his decision about her, so nothing remained but to utterly ignore the girl's existence.

When, however, the professor was laid up in his last illness, Alice, heedless of the jealous conduct of Mrs. Van Oppen, insisted upon seeing her kind protector. It was a great happiness to her that she had been thus persistent, for her visit appeared to have gratified the last earthly wish of the dying savant, who, unseen by the nurse or his wife, pressed into the girl's hand, a little packet containing five hundred dollars.

The next day he died, and a few days after, Mrs. Van Oppen notified Mrs. Silsbee that all responsibility for Miss Maynard, hitherto chargeable to Mr. Van Oppen, must thenceforth cease.

Alice, with her very little fortune of five hundred dollars, was left alone in the world.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COMING HOME.

THE library of Mr. Taylor's house was the scene of an anxious interview.

Miss Maynard and Phillip Rosston had just arrived. It was late in the afternoon when they alighted from the hack, and they had been informed that Mr. Taylor would soon be home from his business.

"Come, Mary," said Phillip, when the servant had quitted the apartment, "do not be so nervous. Remember, Mary—"

But the poor girl cowered down where she sat near him, and putting her hands to her ears, cried out:

"No, no; do not call me by that name!"

Phillip looked at her pityingly, but with a certain sternness of voice, not of manner, said:

"It is absolutely necessary that the step we have taken should be maintained. To draw back now would be cruel to my uncle, and most fatal to ourselves. Heaven is my witness how gladly I would disclose all and ask forgiveness; but it would entail misery where now there is happiness, and I cannot do it. Moreover, remember our solemn promise to the dead!"

Alice patiently listened to all that Phillip had to say, but was little comforted. To an honest nature, a falsehood is ever repugnant; and even when policy or kindness prompt the concealment of a fact, the deceit is to be regretted.

She answered:

"I have thought of all that must be endured, and I shudder with apprehension. It will, I fear, be beyond my power to sustain the deception." And she betrayed very plainly the excitement under which she labored.

It was with difficulty that Phillip, who was himself nervous and anxious, could quiet the alarm of the young girl.

"I feel, Alice, as you do, that we have undertaken a fearful task. Let us, however, think of my dear cousin, and go through with it. Her last prayer and her last imploring look is ever before me."

"But how can I reconcile myself to deceiving your uncle. The discovery of our falsehood will be a sad blow to him. Of myself I do not think—all my sympathy, all my thought is for him."

"With such feelings," replied Phillip, "I believe that when my uncle knows you, under whatever name you may bear, you will so favorably impress him that he will forgive any deception—especially this, which, after all, hurts no one."

"You say that to reassure me, and I thank you from my heart, but still I dread the ordeal. How will Mrs. Taylor receive me?"

"That is a question I have repeatedly asked myself, but cannot find an answer. My aunt—by marriage only, you know—is of a strange nature; not really unkind, but very imperious; not at all the kind of a woman my uncle ought to have married. He does not know how to exercise any influence over her, for she is one

whom the slightest contradiction provokes to anger."

"Is she a New Yorker?"

"I believe not. She lived when young in the West somewhere; it was there my uncle met and married her. But I am glad to see that you are better now—more composed; so again I say, Mary, be of good courage. All is for the best!"

A tremor passed through the girl's frame as she heard this name, and it cost her a powerful effort to appear calm.

With many encouraging assurances, Phillip strove to reconcile Miss Maynard to her task, and in the end he succeeded in giving her sufficient courage to meet his uncle.

Shortly after this conversation, Mr. Taylor reached home.

His reception of his supposed daughter was marked by the utmost feeling and tenderness, and helped very greatly to cover Miss Maynard's confusion, for her embarrassment had the appearance of natural emotion at the meeting.

Very fortunately, too, for her, Mr. Taylor was deeply anxious to know every particular of his brother's illness and demise, and plied his nephew with innumerable questions thereon.

Phillip eagerly seized the chance of sparing Miss Maynard's feelings, and very circumstantially narrated all the incidents of the deceased gentleman's later life, adroitly giving many turns to the conversation, more especially such as related to the business of the San Francisco branch of the house.

His panegyrics upon the character of the dead merchant were truthfully given, for he had felt a sincere affection for his many estimable and noble qualities.

In a short time after this strange meeting a material change in the position of affairs had been effected. Miss Maynard recovered her self-possession; Phillip lost much of the fear which had possessed him, and Mr. Taylor was charmed by the unassuming, excellent qualities so apparent in her whom he looked upon as his daughter, and felt assured that they would win the regard of his wife.

A servant having announced that Mrs. Taylor was in the drawing-room, all three rose and proceeded to dress for dinner in obedience to the summons. Before their arrival, the lady of the house had been entertaining Mr. Jewetson and a couple of his aristocratic friends, who were that day to dine with the family. Mrs. Taylor, very elegantly dressed, sat in an easy-chair, near the fire-place, in which, to counteract the chilly atmosphere, a cheerful fire was burning. She was a handsome woman, somewhat past the grand climacteric, but exceedingly well preserved. She was rather above the average height of women, had finely-chiseled features, an elegant *tournure*, and a commanding presence. Her voice was exceedingly musical; and the only remarkable characteristic apparent to a casual observer was a certain defiance of look, begotten, as it seemed, of a dread of being taken at a disadvantage.

Mr. Jewetson, an excellent specimen of an old-young man or a young-old fop, was very pleasing in manner and speech. He had a cer-

tain air of refinement, much shorn of dignity through vanity, mingled with an airiness almost amounting to frivolity.

His friends, Mr. Wildermoss and the Honorable Cecil Hewitt, were men of position and breeding, without the slightest trace of that blemish of the age among aristocratic *flaneurs*—slang or *persiflage* in conversation; added to which, both were very good looking.

"I assure you, Mrs. Taylor," said Mr. Jewetson, "nothing could have been more delightful than Mrs. Earle's reception. The selection of the company was marked by her usual good sense."

"She has excellent taste and judgment," remarked Mrs. Taylor.

"And not a particle of jealousy, which in a pretty woman is charming and not a little remarkable," added Mr. Wildermoss.

"She would be pleased if she could hear such praises from you," said Mr. Hewitt.

"Yes; that I am sure she would be," continued Mr. Jewetson, "for she is appreciative of all praise from the right quarter. You know, Mrs. Taylor, how small her Lexington avenue house is, and yet so clever is she in all she does that it seemed spacious enough to accommodate the very large number that came. It was a most delightful reunion."

These sentiments were echoed by his friends and by Mrs. Taylor, although the lady had not the advantage of knowing Mrs. Earle, except by sight, and knew no more how the Lexington avenue house looked than she did about the interior of the great pyramid; but she was equal to all society's calls for assumed knowledge.

The conversation proceeded much in the same manner for some time, and nearly all the *on dits*, a few of the milder scandals, and the several events of the season now drawing to a close, were discussed by Mrs. Taylor with apparently absorbing interest, and by the gentlemen with the usual languor with which fashionable conversation is carried on, in which the listener is principally occupied, not so much on what the speaker is saying, as upon the words which shall constitute the reply.

Mr. Taylor came into the door at the very moment when Mr. Hewitt was describing an entertainment which some of the very *creme de la creme* of fashion had organized and carried out for the benevolent purpose of securing a home for lost and strayed—dogs.

"I assure you, Mrs. Taylor," said the calmly-excited speaker, "it was a perfect marvel to see Miss Pomeroy take the part of Tilly Slow-boy in one of the tableaux, and to see the handsome Jack Pinkthorn as a cowboy from the Western Wilds was a sight to be remembered. Ah! how d'ye do, Taylor?" he remarked, as the merchant approached; and then rattled on about this, that, and everybody with any sort of name not beneath remembrance, until he had exhausted the subject after his usual feeble fashion.

Mr. Taylor was delighted to observe that his wife looked pleased with her present company, and he inwardly confessed an admiration for her admirable *aplomb* of manner toward her three aristocratic guests. A few minutes afterward, Phillip entered the room; and after due

presentation to the visitors, and a rather cordial greeting by Mrs. Taylor, sat down by her side at her express invitation.

"I suppose, before leaving St. Louis, Mr. Rosston, you had traveled up the Mississippi from New Orleans?"

The lady's voice was gently modulated, so as to be unheard except by the person whom she addressed.

"I only stopped at a few places—at Vicksburg—at Nashville."

"How long were you at Vicksburg?"

"A week. It was from there that I was summoned by telegram to San Francisco to settle up my uncle's affairs."

"How sad!" murinured Mrs. Taylor. Then added, "Do you know any of the residents—I mean, at Vicksburg?"

"A few. I have generally been there on business only."

"I think, when I was a child, I must have visited the place," said the lady, in a half-musing manner. "Is it not a straggling city, standing on a high bluff?"

"Yes; and covering a large area of ground."

"Indeed! Do you remember the names of any of the leading families there?"

"Oh, yes; there were the Clarkes, the Roussiliers, the Johnstones."

"I seem to recall that name," remarked Mrs. Taylor, looking earnestly at Phillip's face as he spoke. "Are they old residents?"

"Yes; they belong in reality to the city—one of the old *noblesse*, or the F.F.'s—first families, you know."

"Yes; of course. I remember now. They were considered very rich, were they not?"

"Not exactly rich; but very well off. They did not all, however, do credit to their name."

"Indeed!"

And again the lady's eyes seemed fain to pierce the speaker's inmost mind.

Phillip, utterly unconscious of the scrutiny, proceeded: "In large families, you know, there are always black sheep; but I knew so little of the Johnstones that I cannot now even retail the Vicksburg gossip about them."

"Oh, pray do not tax your memory, Mr. Rosston. I really take no interest in the people."

And with a sigh, whether of weariness or relief it was impossible to say, the speaker turned to converse with Mr. Wildermoss at the very moment of the entrance into the room of Alice Maynard.

Mrs. Taylor instinctively arose as the young lady approached her under the escort of her supposed father, and for an instant seemed to put her very soul into her eyes in scrutiny of her face, figure, dress and deportment, all of which was unknown by Alice, whose eyes were downcast, and who felt almost ready to faint.

The examination proved eminently satisfactory, for taking Miss Maynard's hands in her own, Mrs. Taylor drew her toward herself, and imprinted a motherly kiss upon her forehead.

This act, very simply and naturally perform-

ed, was an immense relief to Miss Maynard, while Mr. Taylor, scarcely crediting his senses, was delighted beyond measure.

Dinner was at this juncture announced, upon which Mr. Wildermoss offered his arm to the hostess; Mr. Hewitt conducted Alice; Mr. Taylor and Mr. Jewetson went down together, and Phillip went down alone.

He was not the least pleased one of the family to think that, so far, the serious step had been successfully taken, and the distressing mental strain of the two conspirators thereby somewhat relaxed.

CHAPTER V.

A NEW LIFE.

WHAT was Mr. Taylor's surprise to discover, in a few days, that his wife and Alice had become inseparable and fast friends! All his alarms had been needless, and the many delays he had himself interposed to their meeting had been futile.

Futile, alas! in the one sense that the real Mary had never been clasped in her dear father's arms, nor had known, ere she died, a father's kiss. But of that he was happily ignorant, and it was a mercy that the knowledge did not reach him then, or his heart would have been broken by vain regret and just indignation at the deceit practiced.

Time, which softens all griefs, has also the power to create new joys and sympathies. In the interest of the merchant and of Alice, time was a blessed comforter, for it caused the kind man to regard her with tender affection, while it made the girl very happy in his love, allayed her remorse, and awoke the tenderest feelings of her really noble heart.

To Phillip Rosston there was comfort in the calm progress of events, and he was daily more and more fascinated by the amiable characteristics of his so-called cousin.

Mrs. Taylor, too, found in Alice a gentle companion, in whom she constantly discovered new charms, and for many weeks the little family circle was truly happy.

The grand dinner party and ball with which the season concluded came off in due course, and was a great success. Never had the Taylor mansion held so many really aristocratic visitors, while more millions, in the shape of rotund and stately magnates, were present than upon any occasion, since Mrs. Taylor had entered society as one of its leaders.

A few days after these festivities the whole family left town to enjoy a visit to the seaside, and as the weather happened to be rather chilly, Asbury, from its sheltered position, was selected.

A well-appointed cottage had been hired for the season, servants were sent down in advance, and everything looked auspicious for a pleasant holiday.

A day or two sufficed to settle the new-comers in their marine residence, and Alice, to whom such a life was entirely new, was delighted with all she saw. Mrs. Taylor preferred the usual formal batheings, promenades, and home receptions, to the numerous excursions, picnics.

and impromptu festivities planned and carried out by the younger members of their friends and acquaintances.

Neither Mr. Taylor nor Phillip permanently remained in Asbury, the exigencies of a large mercantile house necessitating the frequent presence in the city of both uncle and nephew. They managed, however, to spend two or three days each week at the seaside, and enjoyed to the full even this limited relief from the cares of commerce. In a very short time Miss Maynard, finding that she was left very much to her own devices, began to take long walks into the surrounding country and upon the sea-shore.

These lonely excursions were gradually increased in distance until she had very nearly explored the whole district within a radius of ten or twelve miles. So strong, too, is early habit, that with this indulgence in wandering, some of her old Missouri habits returned. Nothing delighted her more than to wander along the sea-shore, far from the town and removed from all contact with human beings. There, throwing her hat down on the sand, she would, taking off shoes and hose, delight to walk into the sea, watching its coming and receding waves, and, with little screams of delight, running away from the ever-recurring larger billow—a race between her and mighty ocean. If, miscalculating her distance, the wave, with its quick-sliding movement, threatened to dash itself over her dainty dress, tucked up though it were, she would laugh, would scream with pretended fear, and then clap her hands in childlike glee at her narrow escape from complete submersion.

This little natural comedy was played without witness or audience, and, therefore, it made her happy beyond measure to think that she, who had entered society, with all its established rules of propriety so absolutely laid down, could yet, by her own free will, shake them all off whenever she pleased to take a healthy walk, and then find one corner in the world where she could be alone with nature.

Many a time had she enjoyed these excursions, and she often laughed to herself at the thought of them when, at the stately dinner-table, she found herself listening to fashionable talk or dull platitudes—very much alike. Not that her home was anything but cheerful, but life has so many tedious conventional rules that her escapades were keenly relished by her both in action and remembrance, and she always looked forward to her escape from stiff formalities with eager anxiety.

At this period she was really happy. If for a brief moment the recollection of the part she was playing crossed her mind, the thought was readily appeased when she reflected how truly she loved both the merchant and his wife.

Of Phillip, too, she often thought. After her wild outbursts of merriment, with old Neptune as her coadjutor, she often found herself tired with the sport, and she would then select some sheltered spot and, throwing herself down upon the beach, would gaze into sea and sky, and think.

Visions of the past at such times would fly across her brain, far more quickly than the

traveling clouds traversed her visual senses. She would weary and perplex herself about the past no less than the future. Much of what had transpired in her childhood was clouded and obscure. She knew that the honest old Missouri farmer, Jake Maynard, and his wife were not her parents, although she bore their name, and she remembered that she could never get the otherwise kindly old fellow to give her any information about either her father or her mother.

"Don't ask no questions, my dear," was his invariable answer, "and you won't be told no lies. As long as there's a 'tatur in the fields or an ear of corn in the cob, on this old ranch, you sha'n't want. No, nor when both on 'em fail you shall have enough and to spare, if old Jake Maynard has strength enough left to pull a trigger. There's deer and fish, darling, in this free land of ours, to give you food enough and to spare, and you shall have it. So don't ask no questions, but eat and ax a blessing on the food afore you eat it; that's all you have to think on."

Old Mrs. Maynard was equally reticent and equally clever in putting aside all her childish questionings, therefore she was content to love them dearly and trouble them no further.

But when, launched into life at Mrs. Silsbee's school in St. Louis, she met girls belonging to all the best Southern families, this ignorance of her parentage caused her much distress, and she was obliged to use all her mother wit to avoid exposing her want of knowledge upon so material a point as her birth, well aware that the feeling about such matters in all classes was sensitive and often unjust in the extreme. However, with rare tact she escaped this and other difficulties which her wild bringing up might have exposed her to. Mr. Van Oppen's protection greatly helped her, and her sudden departure from the school spared her any possible insult and degradation which might have been inflicted by indiscretion, not unkindness, on the part of her late school-fellows.

From the past, her thoughts in these day-dreams by the sea-shore were directed to the present, but she did not long entertain their troublesome presence; events were too recent, her fears too vivid, for her to find anything but painful alarm in their contemplation—so she shut the door of that cabinet in memory's store-closet with fear akin to that with which the door of Bluebeard's closet would have been closed had its horrid contents been known in time by his inquisitive spouse.

Of Phillip she thought; and what wonder if, when her thoughts turned to him, as they often did, the sky put on a roseate hue, the murmuring ocean seemed to lap her into a semi-sleep of contentment, and all nature appeared to attune itself to her tender thoughts. She did not deny to herself, although neither by word nor look did she betray it to him, that she loved him.

She watched eagerly for his coming, and it was to him alone that she confided the secret of her wanderings, where often they paced up and down, or sat pretending to read, but uttering no word of love, nor daring to trust the language of the eye.

They returned as they went, calmly happy, conscious of their affection for each other, but never breaking the promise they had inwardly made to themselves not to betray their secrets.

One name was never spoken, though it lay upon their hearts with a softened, gentle influence. Mary was dead to the world, except under the guise of Alice, and nothing could tempt them now to breathe her name between themselves. They deemed the grave had sanctified her memory, and within their own hearts her monument had been erected never more to be disturbed, but to remain forever perfect and beautiful.

Thus the lives of these two young people sped on. They were, when together, happy; but when separated they were nervous and anxious lest some mischance might betray their common secret and involve them both in ruin.

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNFORTUNATE ENCOUNTER.

ONE lovely day Alice had wandered along the ocean road for a long distance, and had finally descended to the beach, just where a little inlet formed a cosey sort of harbor, shut out from all sight from the public path and looking out only upon the ever-moving sea.

The girl was very tired, for it was late when she had left the house, and she had walked rapidly in order to have as long a time in her solitude as possible before the return to dinner, at which Mr. Wildermoss was expected. Mr. Taylor and Phillip were also coming down for a couple of days, and were to arrive at the same hour.

Rather flushed with the unusual exercise her walk had imposed upon her, she threw off her hat, let loose her fair hair, and sat upon her favorite couch, allowing the cool sea-breeze to play through her tresses in a very luxury of enjoyment.

A drowsy feeling soon came over her, the far-off horizon grew softly dim, the light clouds seemed to fall gently down upon the ocean's bosom, the wind seemed lulled, and she slept.

How long she slumbered she knew not at the moment she was awaked; but it was with a start of alarm that she heard a voice, and became conscious of a presence. An instant showed her who it was, and the danger in which she was placed by the speaker, although the speech was very common-place.

"Dear me, if it ain't Miss Maynard!"

Such were the words uttered by Mrs. Harmon, the Buffalo nurse, as she stood open-mouthed in wonder at her discovery.

"Dear me, it is Miss Maynard!" was her second exclamation.

Terror held Alice speechless.

This worthy person, utterly unconscious of the alarm her appearance inspired, and prompted by naturally kindly feelings, came down the declivity leading to the shore, and very comfortably disposed herself upon the sand to rest and have a chat.

To Alice, the whole scene seemed to darken; a mist rose up, if not from the ocean, at any rate before her eyes; the sea, till now gently murmuring, appeared to roar with myriad

voices in her ears, and the very word they uttered thrilled her with alarm, for it sounded like "Impostor!"

Yes; she who had but now deemed her secret safe from discovery—who had put back all thoughts of the past, with a certain assurance of present success—now saw all her foolish hopes shattered by one blow, and the innocent destroyer of the carefully built-up fabric, the inevitable cause of future agony and grief untold, sat complacently smiling, as if awaiting the cordial recognition of an old acquaintance.

What fools she and Phillip had been not to think of this person! How mad, how blind, they had been to enter upon such a task as they had ventured on without taking cognizance of this Mrs. Harmon, who held their fate within her hand!

Where were now the roseate dreams of love and confidence?

The future looked, as did the present, to her blurred sight black as night, behind which stalked disaster to her and Phillip, and heart-breaking to the poor father.

Again, she thought how mad, how blind they had both been not to have thought of all this, and, if thinking of it, not to have planned some way out of the terrible dilemma her very existence involved. A way out of it? That thought rose up simultaneously with the fear which Mrs. Harmon's presence caused. But, think as she might about any way of escape, her mind was so tempest-tossed that she could not concentrate her thoughts, nor even know how to address her unwelcome intruder. All she could do was to gaze at her as before, in amazed horror.

Mrs. Harmon, thinking pride of station held Alice silent, hastened to apologize for appearing so glad to see her; but her very attempt at excuse lacerated the girl's feelings more and more deeply.

"I'm sure I must apologize, Miss Maynard, for addressing you," said the good creature, ignorant of the agony the other endured; "but the sight of you recalled the memory of that poor dear soul, Miss Mary Taylor, now in heaven. Ah, I shall never—never forget her patient endurance during her illness! She was a sweet-tempered angel, if ever there was one in this world, and many a time I think of her now she's gone. And I have thought a deal about you and Mr. Rosston. How is he—a nice, pleasant spoken a gentleman as ever lived?"

Fortunately for Alice, the woman did not wait for any reply, but continued the conversation.

"Just before I left Buffalo, miss, I went out to the cemetery to look at Miss Taylor's grave. The flowers you and Mr. Rosston planted looked fresh and pretty, for all the world as if they had only just been put there. Ah! it is a comfort, when we are gone, to think that there are loving folks who will remember us. That's what I always say to myself when I'm in trouble, and don't know where to look for consolation."

Still, Alice sat spellbound while Mrs. Harmon talked. Her words were heard and some of their meaning understood, but all in a vague and confused manner, for the listener's thoughts

were filled with matters so fraught with terror that she could not realize that the gossiping nurse sat before her any more than she could silence the awful word that rung in her ears, borne on the now turbulent waves—"Impostor!"

"But I've left Buffalo now, and come with a patient to Asbury; a very kind lady she is, but a little light in the head, you know. Not exactly mad, but with fits of violence, miss, that need constant watching. This is the first time I've had an hour to myself since I came here, and to think that I should come upon you so sudden-like, not knowing that you were here!"

Why did not the sea rise up and swallow the speaker, who by every word she uttered inflicted agony upon the listener?

"The house where we live, miss, is just at the top of that road there. The family has taken it for the season, and I'm very comfortable—that is, as comfortable as a person can be having a violent patient to look after constantly. But you seem rather poorly, miss; you're as pale as a ghost. What has been the matter? I suppose the shock of poor Miss Taylor's death was too much for you. I thought you'd lay yourself up, attending so close to her as you did. But she was so good and patient that no one could grudge her anything."

At length the torture of this woman's talk could no longer be borne by Alice Maynard. She saw that the woman must be silenced, and she braced herself to the task. It cost her a mighty effort, however, to converse, even in ordinary tones; but she accomplished it.

"I am much obliged to you, Mrs. Harmond, for the very great kindness to—to our dear friend. We—that is, Mr. Rosston and myself—are very sensible of it, and—" here she paused, not knowing in what way to enlist the woman's interest—"but the fact is, we did not know how to recompense you for your—"

"Recompense, miss? Who was talking of that? Not I! There's nothing I want, thank goodness, that I can't get by working for it. You paid me—leastways Mr. Rosston did—very liberally for what I did, and I was grateful for it; but I don't want to be recompensed beyond being paid my wages for doing my duty. But I'm not an unfeeling woman, miss, and I did take a deep interest in that poor, dear young lady, but that's no reason why there should be any talk of recompense—"

How much longer Mrs. Harmond's anger would have prompted her to resent in speech the unfortunate remark which so offended her it is impossible to surmise; but Alice luckily arrested her in the full tide of her eloquence by gently laying her hand upon her arm, looking up at her face, and simply saying:

"Oh, forgive me! I did not intend to wound your feelings."

"There's no harm done, miss, so long as none was meant; but we poor people, although we do take wages and are servants, have our feelings. But there! say no more, Miss Maynard. I was, maybe, a little too quick myself to take offense, and tending a lunatic patient isn't apt to sweeten one's temper, you must confess."

Alice had now regained enough courage to see that she ran the risk of exciting Mrs. Harmond's

animosity if she did not bring back her wandering thoughts, and listen to, or appear to heed, what the nurse was saying. It was, therefore, with great gentleness that she replied:

"Yes, it must be a sore trial to be always near any one with perverted reason. I pity the friends and those who take care for them far more than I do the patients, for they are, let us hope, unconscious of their own infirmity."

"My very sentiments, miss, but most beautifully expressed. Ah! we nurses see many things in this life that don't bear to be spoken of too loud!"

"I have no doubt of it."

"Yes, miss, there are romances in many families that if they were printed and published wouldn't be believed. But are you all alone here, Miss Maynard?"

"No," stammered Alice; "we—that is, I am here with friends."

"Ah," sighed Mrs. Harmond, "that must be very nice. I used to have friends and relations myself here in this very place. I must hunt them up, and hear all the news, for, you know, miss, these sea-bathing places are rare spots for go-sip."

Yes, Alice knew that—had, indeed, found it out very shortly after her arrival, for, stranger as she was to the ways and manners of fashionable life, she knew that she herself was the object of much comment by their neighbors. Indeed, one morning when standing at the window of the breakfast-room she overheard the servants of the adjoining house canvassing not only the affairs of Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and Mr. Rosston, but very freely debating about herself, her looks, expectations, and her possible marriage. At the time she smiled at the idle curiosity which prompted such doings; but now it flashed upon her that here was a new and most alarming danger to be guarded against—more alarming because Mrs. Harmond was sure to discover the whereabouts of her relations, to hear from them all the news of the latest comers, and add to them her own share of adventures since she had last seen them. Her life at Buffalo would be certain to furnish material for narrative, and there the greatest danger lay. Should her relatives be in possession of any information, however slight, of Mr. Taylor and his family, any casual allusion to the name and to Mr. Rosston before Mrs. Harmond would lead to comment, questioning, and to exposure.

Dangerous as the presence of the nurse in Asbury was, it was still greater if she was allowed to pass out of sight and knowledge. Safety, or, at any rate, vigilant watchfulness could only be secured by a perfect knowledge of where Mrs. Harmond could be found.

With her mind now clear upon this point, she continued the conversation:

"Well, Mrs. Harmond, I am very glad to have met you. I do not know how long I may remain here; but I should very much like to have your address, so that I might see you again before I leave, if I have the opportunity."

"Certainly, miss; and I shall be pleased to see you, and anything that I can do for your own sake and for the sake of that dear dead young lady—"

"Yes, I know how you feel; but, oh, spare

me! I cannot bear to speak of her. Give me your address."

"Here's the card of the gentleman where I'm living now. You can put my name on the back of it when you get home. But might I ask for your address, miss, if not too bold?"

"Yes, I will send it. I have not a card with me, and have no means of writing it down. I will send it."

"Oh, thanks, miss! I hope you won't forget."

And the good woman, after courtesying deeply, slowly mounted the beach. When she made a movement to leave the spot Alice felt relieved, and watch her departure with a lightened heart.

After reaching the top of the roadway she turned to courtesy once more, and, as if prompted by some evil genius, again spoke.

"You'll not forget to send me your address, will you, Miss Maynard?"

And then turning round for the last time, almost ran into the arms of a gentleman, to whom she offered an apology, and then disappeared in the turn of the road.

Alice, who had watched her every movement, beheld with dismay that the gentleman whom the nurse encountered, who must have overheard her last speech, and who stood smiling and bowing to the terror-stricken girl, was none other than Mr. Wildermoss.

How she reached home she never knew, but she was conscious that she had not refused to accept the arm of the gentleman who had so strangely witnessed Mrs. Harmond's departure, and who she felt sure must have overheard the volatile woman's last remark. But here again she was at fault, for neither by word nor look did he betray that he had heard or seen the nurse.

He chatted pleasantly and lightly on the road home; that she remembered, although she was equally sure that her replies must have been strangely misplaced, for, indeed, her thoughts were not with what he said or what she answered.

She reached home in a most unhappy mood, whereas she had started out with a light and cheerful heart.

Her reception of Phillip, who had arrived before she got home, was embarrassed; while his greeting to her became cold and restrained when he saw her coming toward the house leaning upon the arm of Mr. Wildermoss, who was in the best of spirits, and declared that he had never enjoyed a walk so much as the one which had been honored by Miss Taylor's company.

Was there an accentuated pause when he said "Miss Taylor?" Surely not; and yet her ear was delicately sensitive for any slight, or any evidence of suspicion.

If, on the contrary, he had overheard Mrs. Harmond's last speech, why had he not questioned her? The circumstance of her being called by any one by a name different to that by which she was known would have been warrant for inquiry.

She thought this over all the way as they walked homeward, but he made no sign of having any doubt upon his mind, and she was forced to put the dread that he had heard and

noted the nurse's speech aside, and tried to assure herself that she had nothing to fear upon that score. But even while she was comforting herself with this, all her doubts recurred with increased force when she remembered the glitter of his eye as it fell upon her when Mrs. Harmond was lost to sight in the bend of the road. It was, however, useless to endeavor to arrive with certainty at a knowledge of how much or how little Mr. Wildermoss knew, and the gong warned her she had not more than sufficient time to dress for dinner.

The truth is, that Arthur Wildermoss was a marvel to not a few clever people who thought they knew him well; and to no one was he a greater puzzle than to his own father, the pompous, but very clever Banker Wildermoss. This worthy gentleman was much troubled at not being able to read the character of his own son after the fashion with which he read a printed book.

In the first place, the banker was a perfectly honorable man, who hated all manner of deceit; and if he was somewhat prosy in the house, he was exceedingly quick-witted in all dealings in affairs of business. He liked to know all about everything, and he detested mystery of any kind.

His son, Arthur, was perfectly obedient in everything proper for a son to be obedient in; he was not a horse-racing or a gambling man; he observed all the rules of decorum laid down for due observance, and transgressed none of those obligations which fashionable society has imposed for its own protection.

He was very good-looking, dressed faultlessly, and never gave vent to any but the most elevated sentiments.

What, then, was it that annoyed his father? What was it that made most men salute him gravely and politely, and then turn from him, glad to be relieved of his presence? Why did his equals, to whom he was invariably courteous, dislike him? And why did dependants, to whom he gave freely *largeesse*, despise and sneer at him even when accepting his bounties? The mystery was not deep, nor was it difficult of solution, although it was never solved by the worthy banker, his father.

The fact is, that Arthur Wildermoss was utterly devoid of feeling—in other words, he had no heart. His equals felt it without knowing it, and his inferiors knew it without feeling its want. All the conveniences of life were rigidly observed by him as far as outward show demanded, but his life had been, and still promised to be, an utter failure, owing to the want of that single attribute of human sympathy which makes the whole world kin.

Such was the man into whose hands Alice Maynard had so unfortunately fallen, for she felt that she had lost liberty, and had to endure the thralldom of mind which a dangerous secret imposed upon her when its power was held by such a man.

Woman-like, she had a delicate appreciation of the finer lights and shadows of character, and she knew she could not be mistaken in the estimate of this cool, collected, but heartless gentleman. Had she needed assurance of the fact, the recollection of the one baleful look he

gave her would have convinced her beyond all doubt.

The dinner was but a dull one, after all. Mr. Taylor had been much worried in business before leaving the city, and was too tired to talk. Phillip was taciturn and sad; and Mrs. Taylor seemed worried, and was little inclined for conversation. The only person who appeared thoroughly at ease was Mr. Arthur Wildermoss. He seemed not only pleased with everyone, but was evidently happy with some odd fancy, known only to himself.

However, even dull dinners must terminate sooner or later; and it was with a sigh of relief that Alice obeyed Mrs. Taylor's hint to rise.

When she reached the drawing-room she sought out a secluded corner, and, biding her face from Mrs. Taylor, shed a few comforting tears after the excitement of the last few hours.

When the gentlemen came up stairs—for they did not linger over their wine—Phillip took a seat near by, and, idly turning over the leaves of a book of travel, addressed her in a low tone, while Mr. Taylor and Arthur sat down to a game of chess.

"What has happened?" almost whispered Phillip. "You appear to be very unhappy!"

"No, not unhappy; but I am tired. I must have walked too far. The sun was really hot, you know, and the sea air seems always to fatigue one. Don't you think so?"

"I think that something has happened which you do not wish me to know. But tell me," he added, almost sternly, "has that man anything to do with your unhappiness?" And his eyes fell upon Mr. Wildermoss with no very great admiration as he spoke.

That apparently unobservant man chancing to look up at the moment encountered that look, which he returned with a gracious smile and a slight inclination of the head, which might be read either as a warning that he was vigilant, even of looks, or that he accepted the unfriendliness in the same manner in which it was offered. Phillip vainly strove to draw from Alice the cause of her sadness, and failing in his attempts, he turned at last regretfully away. She seized the opportunity of gliding from the apartment and retiring to her own room.

The game of chess between Mr. Wildermoss and Mr. Taylor did not exhibit any marked strategic skill; so, the guest, perceiving that his host's mind was more upon affairs of commerce than upon the safety of his queen or the dignified security of his king, quietly made a "draw" of the game, and then arose and took his departure. Carefully lighting a cigar, he strolled very leisurely in the direction of the hotel, and evidently found much matter for deep thought.

Arriving at his temporary home, he drew a chair into the deep bay-window, and sat smoking till long after midnight. His eyes were directed seaward, but his thoughts were elsewhere, for he did not seem to notice the strangely beautiful sight the ocean presented, dazzling and sparkling under a rich, full, bright moon. He did not heed the passage of the ships, the progress of the steamers as they crossed the horizon, any more than he heard the creaking of the timbers and cordage of the fishing-boats

as they were gently swayed to and fro by the waves.

His thoughts must have been very worldly, for his face betrayed no softness in its expression, but seemed to harden as he pondered.

Whatever may have been the subject of his meditations, he at length arrived at a conclusion apparently satisfactory to himself, for with a gratified air he got up from his seat and sought his bed, there doubtless to take up the thread of his reverie.

CHAPTER VII.

FRIEND OR FOE.

MRS. HARMOND was seen no more by Alice Maynard, and the alarm she had caused was passing away when a fresh source of annoyance, very serious in its character, assailed her.

She had resolved to take no more solitary walks, being fearful of meeting the garrulous nurse, and therefore reduced her exercise to a daily visit to the pier in company with Mrs. Taylor.

That lady chose the spot as most convenient for the meeting of friends and acquaintances, for, as everybody made a point of promenading there daily at the fashionable hour in the afternoon, the interchange of greetings was easily effected.

Whenever she found Mrs. Taylor deeply engaged in gossip with some of her aristocratic friends, Alice quietly excused herself and sought a more retired spot, where, between reading and thinking, she spent her time. As Mrs. Taylor allowed her perfect liberty of action, she only expected her when the hour for returning home arrived. When, offering the elder lady her arm, the two went back to the house, Mrs. Taylor retailed just as much of the news she had heard as she thought would interest her companion.

Two weeks after Alice's meeting with Mrs. Harmon, and when the event itself was fading away from her memory, she left Mrs. Taylor one afternoon upon the pier, according to custom, and crept to her favorite seat in a booth near by. Resolved to finish the book she had commenced two days previously, and being really much interested in its contents, she entirely abstracted her thoughts from anything but the open page before her. So absorbed was she in what she read that she did not notice the approach of the person whom of all others she least desired to see, and it was not until he began to speak that she was aware of his presence.

"I presume your book is very entertaining. May I ask its name?"

She raised her eyes, and perceived that the speaker was Mr. Wildermoss, who again addressed her as he politely and with a courteous bow took the book from her listless hand and looked at its title.

"One of George Sand's works, I perceive," he said, smiling.

Alice had by that time recovered from her surprise, and noting the exemplary politeness of the speaker, answered cheerfully:

"She is a favorite author of mine. Do you like her writings?"

"I think they are delightful. There is always such a vein of deep thought and studious inquiry into motive in all her works. Her characters are never commonplace, even when drawn from the lower classes. They have individuality, and that is always charming."

"Those," said Alice, "are the very qualities which I admire. Have you read her 'Consuelo,' and its sequel?"

"Yes, twice. Some of her comedies are grand—too grand for the American stage. We have no actors now."

"Indeed!"

He sat down by her side as he handed back her book, and then, with a very deliberate but perfectly polite air, replied:

"No, we have no great artists on the stage who can interpret the higher class of comedy. Our best actors and actresses are to be found, not on, but off, the stage."

"What can you mean? Surely you do not allude to amateurs? They are generally considered very poor artists."

"I do not allude to amateurs. I point my remark to people in our every-day world, who, without the delusive glamour of the theater, act a part with a realism of effect which is astounding!"

"I presume such people were intended by nature for the stage, but somehow missed their vocation?"

"Well, not exactly."

"Then I am at a loss to understand you."

And Alice reopened her book to read, anxious, without knowing why, to close the conversation.

"Your pardon, Miss—Taylor; but may I claim a few moments of your valuable time?"

"Oh, certainly, if you desire it!"

"I do. It is for your own sake, Miss—Taylor, that I ask it."

"For my sake? I am really quite at a loss to comprehend you."

"Let me hasten to explain. I said just now, in the course of an idle chat, that some of our best artists were those who played their parts not upon the stage, but in private life."

"Well?"

The word was uttered proudly enough, but the terrified girl was nearly fainting with apprehension.

"It has been my exceeding good fortune to meet one of the cleverest in the person of Miss Taylor."

"Mr. Wildermoss, you forget yourself. I can no longer listen to you."

"Excuse me, my dear young lady. Nothing could be further from my thoughts than to offer an insult to you. I respect your talents so much that I would fain be enrolled as one of the humblest and most devoted of your admirers."

Alice's indignation conquered her fear, and rising from the seat on which her persecutor had placed himself, she was about to seek Mrs. Taylor, when Mr. Wildermoss, speaking very quietly, but very distinctly, said: "Why should you suspect me, Miss Maynard of desiring to injure you?"

He had, then, heard the name spoken by Mrs. Harmond. Did he know all, or was it only a ruse to entrap her into confession? Why had

he been silent for more than two weeks? These questions flashed across her brain with fearful rapidity.

She had been so long expecting just such a blow, that now, when it fell, it was not so hard to bear as she had feared.

Her courage was great enough to look into her enemy's eyes, and read the triumph which gleamed and sparkled there. If nothing else encouraged her to meet such cruelty by her own art, that look would have given her strength for the contest. It was with a calm voice, as she stood looking down upon him, that she answered, "You have possessed yourself of a name addressed to me by a woman whom I met by the seaside, and it would be folly in me to attempt to deny that I was so addressed. But why you revive the occurrence by uttering that name I have yet to learn."

"Excuse me, Miss Maynard—I mean Miss Taylor—it was only from a desire to serve you that I recalled the incident. Pray listen to me," he added, as she was about to interrupt him.

"When a young lady, known in society by one name, is addressed out of society by another name, there must be good reason for her permitting such a thing to be done unchallenged. The act is an insult, and where such an offense is perpetrated without punishment, there must be a mystery."

"Well, sir," she said, as he looked up, as if expecting her to speak, "I await the close of your remarks."

"I was about to add, if there is a mystery—and his tone was impressive—"if there is a mystery, there is also danger; and it is to guard against or avert danger that I offer my services. Will you accept them?"

She looked at him long and earnestly, not boldly, but with the keen, searching look of a pure woman trying to read the inmost thoughts of a man that she felt was dangerous, and whom she now knew to be treacherous.

Look as she might, she could not fathom his thoughts, far less divine his motives, although her woman's instinct told her both were bad; nor could she tell by her scrutiny of his face how much or how little he knew about this mystery.

His was a face which betrayed few emotions, since he never felt a generous impulse, and his eyes were as cold and shallow as his feelings, so that looking into them was like gazing into a clear but shallow pool which did not even reflect surrounding objects.

She resolved, however, not to yield, and with quick intuitive skill she settled her plan of action; hence her reply:

"I am very greatly obliged Mr. Wildermoss, for your offer, and I gladly accept it. What I require to aid me in my present difficulty, as the only means of avoiding that danger you speak of, is your word, as a gentleman, never to repeat to a living soul the remark you overheard addressed to me. Have I your promise?"

He saw he was caught in his own trap, but, like a clever tactician, he accepted defeat with a smiling countenance, resolved to lay his anger aside, and allow it to increase until the moment of revenge should come.

"Of course, my dear Miss Maynard—I mean Miss

Taylor, I give you my word of honor not to mention it to a living soul."

"Oh, thanks, I am very much indebted to you for your promise."

"I may, then, hope that your gratitude—"

"Will be very constant, I assure you," said the clever girl, well knowing to what he would fain lead the conversation, "But I see my step-mother is looking for me, and I must not keep her waiting. Good-day; so much obliged! No—pray do not trouble; I can find my way alone;" and she was gone.

He sunk back into his seat with what sounded very like a muttered oath; and his friends who encountered him that day noticed how particularly out of temper he appeared.

Alice was nearly giving way, and had she not escaped from Mr. Wildermoss's presence she must have swooned, but she arrived by the side of Mrs. Taylor without attracting the notice of that lady.

So far, the victory was with Miss Maynard. How long would it remain so?

CHAPTER VIII.

DREAMS.

A STRANGE drama revealed itself that night in a dream to Mrs. Taylor. A thick forest in the Southern States. Time—autumn. The leaves of the maple, which here abounded, turning from a delicate crimson into blood-red, typical of the daily events passing in a country where a fratricidal war was raging, and where hundreds of thousands of men were imbruing their hands in blood; where the fiercest passions found vent in slaughter; where homes were laid waste, and helpless women and babes were driven forth, not sure of a crust of bread, or a roof to shelter them.

The tide of war swept over field and forest, down mighty rivers, across once smiling homesteads, on through prosperous cities, across prairies, past hamlets, into bright little country towns and villages, up into bayous and moss-lined creeks, scouring through ship-lined harbors, devastating, destroying, and maddening the human race in its progress.

Fathers, sons, friends, brothers—all fiercely contending against each other in blind fury, and immolating, on the shrine of war, those whom they had once dearly loved. There was neither pause nor pity in the acts of men maddened by war's passion. Destruction of life, of property, of hope, of sentiment—of all that should be cherished and preserved—was the one only idea which war fostered, and those who had learned its lesson grew emulous of distinction in the horrid purpose. From north to south, from east and west to south, thousands rushed, eager to take part in the dreadful work, while the wails of deserted women, the screams of the maimed and wounded, and the cries of little children, were drowned in the rattle of musketry, the beat of drums, and the roar of cannon.

Old men were driven from spots where they had dwelt from childhood, and feebly endeavored to lead forth with them delicate women and infants, seeking to find homes where homes there were none, and many finally lying down to rest never more to rise, while past and around

them, still increasing in numbers and in fury, swept the warlike hosts, intent upon the one great act of destruction of all things that could be destroyed which possessed their frenzied souls.

The crops grew, and ripened and rotted because there were none to gather them, while, all around, misery and gaunt starvation increased, and finally went to swell the great number of the dead with which war was fed and nourished into dread proportion.

In this Southern forest, where the din and roar of battle had but lately resounded, a group of badly uniformed, gaunt and savage-looking men surrounded one wretched creature, who searched in vain among the fierce faces for a trace of pity or a show of human interest. He saw none, and groaned aloud in his agony as he heard the short sharp sentence which was, a few moments later, to rob him of life.

It was no uncommon picture which this group presented, for at any hour, almost any moment, similar scenes might have been witnessed throughout the length and breadth of this once fair Southern country, while war held high revel, and death and agony had ceased to terrify all, save their victims.

A guerrilla band of patriots (so called) held in their circling midst one whom they deemed a spy. Of what use were the poor wretch's prayers for mercy, oaths of innocence, and shrieks for a hearing? None! The word had been spoken, the sentence had been passed.

Clutching the miserable creature by the throat, two of the more burly of the troop dragged him across the open space and planted him against a hemlock tree, while five others, with coarse jests upon their lips, loaded their rifles and sauntered off a little to the other side.

The two had dragged their victim from the circle, finding that he could not stand erect, pulled off his blue blanket coat, tore it into ribbons, and slipping one around his body close beneath his arms, passed it around the tree. Another bandage they placed across his forehead, also around the tree, so that his head, supported by these, gave a horribly grotesque show of courageously facing his murderers, while the sweat-drops on his pale brow betrayed his agony. The two executioners then retired.

The five, who had looked to their arms, then advanced, and taking cool, deliberate aim, amid jokes and bets between themselves, pulled their triggers, and a man was dead, riddled with balls and saturated with blood.

The five, looking neither to right nor left, nor at the corpse, wheeled awkwardly, and soon rejoined their company along with the two subordinate murderers, and all, with yells of laughter and with brutal jests, marched stragglingly out of the forest across the clearing on to the high-road, and there and then joined another cohort bound upon the same bloody errand of glorifying war and all its attributes.

With a shriek of more than mortal agony, Mrs. Taylor awoke from her sleep in which this dream of ruthless murder had been enacted. She sobbed convulsively, and looked around as if to assure herself that what she had so vividly seen was not reality.

No; the room, dimly lighted by a candelabra with colored globes, was luxuriously appointed. Easy-chairs and ottomans and all the elegant furnishings of a wealthy home were around her, and the full, rich moon shone through the open window, and was reflected in myriad ripples by the restless sea, the leaping of whose waves upon the beach came murmuringly and faintly on her ears.

She arose, and hurriedly putting on a wrapper, crossed to the casement and gazed out upon the ocean, fearful for a time of even looking back into the room where these horrors of her dream seemed to have been more than pictured.

The scream alarmed Alice, who slept in the adjoining room, and as Mr. Taylor was not expected at Asbury for several days, he feared that sudden illness or some dire catastrophe had alarmed the elder lady, and hastily entered the apartment.

"Ah, Mary," said Mrs. Taylor, "thank you for coming! I was so terrified that I must have alarmed you with my scream. But how is it, dear, that you are up and dressed at this late hour?"

"I was not sleepy, and the night is so beautiful that I sat by the window looking out upon the sea, and I really did not know the hour. But what alarmed you?"

"Nothing but a dream. Pray to Heaven, child, that you may never have such a one, for it was so dreadful that even now I shudder when I think of it."

"Then I will stay with you if you will allow me. I assure you I am not tired, and if you will let me lie here upon this couch I may even sleep for an hour or two and you will feel more confident. You will let me do so, will you not?"

"Certainly, child; and I thank you for proposing it. I am better now, but not quite myself. Dreams have a strange power over us, have they not?"

"I never dream."

"You never dream? Are you sure of that?"

"Not in my sleep, I mean."

"When, then, do you dream, my dear? I am curious to know."

"When I am awake. That is what they call day-dreams. I often have those."

"Indeed! You must tell me all about them."

"Ob, I have not much to tell!" answered the girl, as she leaned her head upon the arm of the chair where Mrs. Taylor sat. "Yet I have one day-dream which is not all a dream, but seems rather the revivifying of some old memory of an event that may or may not have happened, of which I have no knowledge except when my day-dream comes upon me."

"And what is this old memory or more than half-forgotten fact?" asked Mrs. Taylor.

"It is about some great trouble. There seems to be mixed up in my recollection the movement of vast numbers of men—angry men. Then there is a noise not unlike thunder, only sharper, clearer—perhaps like artillery; but I have never heard that. Then I seem to have been wandering across fields, to have slept under trees, and then more strange faces—"

"Well, child, what then?"

And Mrs. Taylor gazed eagerly at the girl by her side.

"Well, then it all seems to occur again, and again; and then I lose myself, and become confused in trying to follow out this story, which is no story, or, rather, this day-dream, which is more like a fading memory."

"What you tell me is strange—very strange!" said Mrs. Taylor, more as if to herself than to Alice.

So strange was it to her thinking, that she could not, although she tried, dismiss it from her mind, but sat gazing at her companion, who, having recovered from the temporary fright which Mrs. Taylor's scream had caused, gradually yielded to the influence of sleep, being—without, perhaps, knowing it—really fatigued.

She had extended herself upon the couch with her right arm beneath her head and her face turned partly toward the elder lady.

As she lay thus, Mrs. Taylor flung a rich, warm mantle over her limbs, and smoothed her luxuriant tresses, which, truth to say, were sadly disordered, and streamed over the sofa-cushion in rich profusion.

Then returning to her seat after wrapping a cloak around her own shoulder, the merchant's wife sat for some time in silence.

The strangeness of Alice's day-dreams she could not dismiss from her mind; and ever and anon she turned her head in the direction of the sofa, only to see the large eyes of the girl gradually disappearing beneath their richly-fringed lids in the very luxury of languor and coming sleep.

Only once did she disturb the quiet, by saying:

"Is that all you ever see—I mean in your day-dreams?"

"Yes," answered Alice, softly; "that is nearly all, yet it is sometimes more full of detail. Let me think! Oh, yes; I seem to see a house with a wide, long veranda, with climbing vines running up its columns and arching across the opening, and upon this wide porch there are sometimes figures—two or three old people and some young ones; I do not mean children. Yes, and near this house there are large trees, and beyond them a great field, and—that's all, that is all!"

And, with a gentle sigh, the girl fell asleep.

When her low, quiet breathing indicated that she slumbered, Mrs. Taylor softly rose, crossed the room, took a lighted lamp from the dressing-table, and noiselessly returned to the side of the sofa.

Then, holding the light above Alice's head, she gazed long and earnestly upon the slumbering girl.

When her scrutiny was ended, she as softly replaced the lamp, and resumed her seat near the open window.

The gray ashen hues of morning had streaked the distant horizon, and the golden light of day seemed just ready to burst into brilliancy as the watcher crept softly from the window and sought her couch, the while the girl slept on in a calm and happy sleep.

Phillip, when he came down to Asbury two

days later at his uncle's request, determined to take the first opportunity of speaking seriously to Miss Maynard about Arthur Wildermoss, her seeming intimacy with whom he considered most detrimental to her. Not that he knew or had heard anything against him, for, from all whom he met that knew Arthur Wildermoss, he had received just such a high character as a gentleman moving in good society should possess.

Of course, Mr. Rosston not being a member of any New York club, did not hear the opinion of clubmen who knew Arthur. This was a pity, for a true clubman is always able to sum up a fellow clubite in the briefest and most analytic manner. He does it apparently without uttering half a dozen words, but they are conclusive; and woe betide the man, socially, whom his fellow members do not like, for he shall lead a life of torture almost too great to bear, without the smallest chance of remonstrance or even explanation.

This test of character among gentlemen is a very valuable one, for it draws the line so sharply and definitely that he must either be a fool, or a good deal of a knave, that can fly in the face of a judgment from which there is literally no appeal.

Among those who knew Arthur only as Arthur Wildermoss was known, there was nothing valuable to be gained, for unless they were his equals they feared to say anything against him, while any detraction would fall to the ground for want of circumstantial proof. They might say, "Yes, he's a very nice fellow, but there are many who do not like him;" or, "Well, I don't like him, but so many speak highly of him that I would rather not express an opinion;" and so on, indefinitely.

Mr. Cecil Hewitt, however, happening to travel in the same smoking-car with Mr. Rosston from the city, the conversation oddly, or naturally enough, it is hard to say which, turned, after many subjects had been discussed, upon Mr. Wildermoss.

"He's a very nice fellow, indeed, is Arthur," said his friend; "a very nice fellow. Only he's such a puzzle to most people; even I don't understand him!"

As Mr. Wildermoss's mental caliber was very greatly superior to Mr. Hewitt's, that gentleman's ignorance on the subject was not to be wondered at.

"You see," continued Mr. Hewitt, as he puffed contemplative rings of cigar smoke, and watched their ascension into nothingness, "Arthur is so close about some things, and so very open about others. Among women he doesn't make much headway, although he is very particular in desiring to impress them with his undoubted respect for the sex."

"I think there can be no doubt about that!" remarked Phillip.

"Not the slightest! Nobody ever doubted it, except the ladies themselves; that's the singular part. The old gentleman, his father, doesn't doubt it, although he doubts a great deal about Arthur; but then, you see, he doesn't understand him, and never will. As I told you, even I do not comprehend him!"

"What are his weaknesses? Does he bet? Is he fond of whist, or—"

"Hasn't a vice—not even a petty one; that's another of the strange things about him. I don't believe he would take or lay the odds on a dead certainty, or touch a card if a penny was the stake! He's the very picture of goodness, as far as those things go. He's not close-fisted, either. I know a good many men he has helped with money—men he did not like—that's the marvel; and yet he never speaks of what he has done, nor, for the matter of that, of what he has not done. I do believe that he doesn't allow himself to know anything about himself."

At this conceit of his own about his friend, Mr. Cecil Hewitt laughed heartily, and then puffed his cigar-smoke in such thick clouds that the air soon became half filled with it.

Had it not been for this semi-obscenity, he would have seen how eagerly and impatiently Phillip Rosston leaned forward and listened to everything about Arthur Wildermoss.

The good-tempered gentleman did not, however, see this, but rattled along very agreeably about men and things after his own fashion all the way to Asbury, neither requiring nor expecting any answer or comment from his now silent companion.

The first person they encountered upon the platform as they alighted from the carriage was his friend himself, not in the most agreeable of moods, and evidently not much pleased with himself or mankind.

He was particularly displeased with Miss Maynard. She had outwitted him, and placed him in a false position, and the slight she had inflicted upon him caused a wound which not all his wealth or his philosophy could heal.

If he could but tame her haughty spirit! If he could only cause her to fear him enough to acknowledge his superiority! If he could do more than that, and make her love him! Ah, that would a noble revenge! But it seemed hopeless.

And yet not, perhaps, quite hopeless. More extraordinary things had happened than that of a woman who began by hating a man—and he knew she hated him—ending by loving him. It had been told in poem and story, and he had read it often. Why should it not happen to her?

But then, again, why should he so torment himself about this girl? A mere nobody—only a merchant's daughter, if all was true. Nothing but an adventuress, if all was false.

What did she mean by having two names?

Why did she go about with an alias to worry him and to torment his soul?

Why should he be worried about her? Why not let her practice her deception, and do what she pleased without let or hindrance from him?

Why? Because—and when he answered all these questions to himself, he felt how weak and insignificant he became in his own estimation—because he loved her.

Yes, there was no doubt about it. He knew it—had known it—but never confessed it to himself. From the moment he first saw her he loved her.

When he thought of that, and of her triumph over him at the moment he thought he had her at his very feet, he was ready to curse the love he felt for her, to curse her, and to lay violent hands upon himself, and end it all.

This cold-hearted, calculating man had proved false to his own teachings. His utter indifference to the world's grifts or sympathies, of which he was secretly proud, was upset, and he knew that it was an in posture upon himself.

He resented this, in his mind, upon the one who had universally upset the cynicism of his life, and had utterly demolished all his sophistical arguments that the world did not contain a thought or a sentiment which a clever man need respect or do more homage to than such lip-service as society looked for and expected.

He felt that he could not endure that she should enjoy the triumph over him; but he could see no way out of the bonds in which she had placed him. She had tied his tongue so securely, that he almost feared by accident to betray her secret; for although he had no inner respect for his promise when his angry love for her flashed across his mind, and made him feel hot, and cold, and angry all at the same moment, yet he had lived so much the life of a gentleman, and had been so schooled, and had so schooled himself into the proprieties and their observance, that it never once suggested itself, even in his angriest mood with her, to break his word.

Thus far she had read his character aright, and had secured her own safety from him by that reading. If she had been less observant, or less quick, he would have held her at his mercy—and she knew what that meant, and shuddered at the thought—whereas it was he was bound to obey her orders, and to guard her secret with perfect faith and loyalty.

All that she knew of this was also known to him, and again he was cut to the quick by the reflection.

It was by pure accident that he had strolled to the railway station, and it was with no great friendliness that he bowed to Phillip while he shook the hand of his friend, Mr. Cecil Hewitt, whom he was glad to see, if for no other reason than he knew that gentleman could talk without expecting answers, and he was disinclined to do anything just now but listen. He therefore, with another and more distant bow to Phillip, drew his friend away from that gentleman, and jumping into his T cart with him, gave the horse a fierce cut, and drove at a terrific pace away, not in the direction of the town.

Phillip walked slowly toward the sea, for having arrived by an early train, he did not care just then to go straight to the house; besides which, he half hoped to find Alice either on the sands or at her favorite seat near the pier.

He did not find her on the beach, which was covered by housemaids and their charges, occupied with the usual seaside amusements, of which gossip and sand-digging were the principal. Not a few invalids, in their chairs, had been moored in sheltered spots, to gaze with jack-luster eyes out upon the sea. There the white caps, very plentiful this morning, danced and sparkled as they chased each other in very

wantonness of movement, while the gulls flying overhead now and again darted into their midst, to seize some specially attractive morsel of food, which, once secured, they with arrow-like swiftness bore away.

Resisting the pressing requests presented by the half shore-going mariners to "Have a sail this mornin'? Beautiful mornin' for a sail!" and heedless of the many appeals to buy the thousand and one useless things always upon sale at seaside resorts, and even declining to have his "photo took" by an artist unfamiliar with soap, and deeply dyed in nitrate of silver as regards his fingers, Phillip quitted the beach, and sought Alice upon the pier.

She was not, however, there, although in his search for her he attracted a good deal of attention, and had to run the gauntlet of greeting from several friends and acquaintances, to all of whom he was bound to show some courtesy.

At last he reached the shore again, having gone out to the extremest point, and returned without encountering her. He felt disinclined to seek her at the house at that time, so he turned his back upon the rapidly-filling pier, and a deaf ear to the band, which had just begun operations with selections from *Tannhauser*, and wandered along the sea-road.

By some strange perversity of fate, he pursued in his walk the very path which Alice had traversed, and paused to rest, as she had done, at the little inlet, even reclining in the very little nook, where she had fallen asleep, lulled by the busy waves.

How was it that Mrs. Harmond, who had been away from Asbury ever since the day after Alice had seen her, traveling with her mad patient, had only returned on the very day selected by Phillip for his wanderings? By what evil chance had she selected the very hour that Phillip had chosen for his visit, and having so chosen, why had Arthur Wildermoss, in his T cart, with his friend, Mr. Hewitt, dreadfully alarmed by his friend's furious driving, dashed past at the very moment of her recognition by Mr. Rosston?

Rapidly as the horse was traveling, Mr. Wildermoss's quick eye had recognized her as well as Phillip, and noted, too, the start the latter gave at the meeting.

Here was food for bitter thought. Both, then, knew the woman. She and Phillip had a secret in common, which his folly in making that promise did not allow him to discover. How he hated that Phillip Rosston, and hating him, how cruelly he lashed the noble horse he was driving, as if he had made the cut across that gentleman's face—as he would dearly like to do—and thus set his disapproving mark thereon.

When Mr. Hewitt entreated him to spare the poor horse, he held his hand for a time, and laughed a bitter laugh; meanwhile the T cart dashed on, and was soon far from the spot where Mrs. Harmond and Phillip stood watching the retreating vehicle.

A long and interesting conversation passed between the two who had thus strangely met; and Phillip, without betrayal of his motive, very clearly showed the nurse how any allusion to the events at Buffalo, at that particular time,

would be the cause of great trouble to Alice and himself. In the course of this conversation he learned, very much to his relief, that the very day Alice had encountered Mrs. Harmoud was the one on the evening of which he had noted Miss Maynard's abstracted manner. His suspicions that Arthur's attendance upon the young lady in her walk home had been the cause of her apparent coldness to him were removed, and he reproached himself for entertaining them.

Mrs. Harmoud, although possessed of a full share of inquisitiveness, had too much respect for the young people not to assure him that she would be guarded in all she said; and Phillip left her with greater peace of mind than the first sight of her seemed to promise, and turned his steps back to the town, eager to see Alice, and offer apologies for his doubts, and acquaint her with all that had passed.

While he was proceeding thither by one road, Mr. Wildermoss was approaching the same by another, having made a complete circuit at breakneck pace, much to the alarm and discomfort of Mr. Hewitt. That gentleman no sooner saw himself near the more thickly-populated part, than he entreated his friend to allow him to alight, which request was at last sullenly acceded to.

Mr. Hewitt resisted a pressing invitation to dine with his excited friend, and jumping into a passing carriage made straight for his own lodgings, vowing never again, under any circumstances, to ride in a cart of which Arthur Wildermoss was charioteer.

This defection of his friend, whom he would fain have kept near him for that evening at least, annoyed him very much, coming as it did so closely upon his other adventures; and he had nothing else to do than to drive to his hotel, and there, after finding fault with everything and every one, sit himself down in solitary grandeur to nurse his wrath.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INQUISITIVE STRANGER.

"It is an immense relief to me, Alice, to have discovered your meeting with the nurse that day. You know how vexed I was about your walking with Arthur Wildermoss."

"It would be as well, perhaps, to say no more on that subject."

"But you forgive me, do you not?"

"It is not for me either to judge or to forgive."

They were upon the pier; the night was beautifully calm, but there was no moon, and the place was, where they stood, almost deserted.

Phillip spoke next, and his voice was very low and earnest. He took her hand in his, but her eyes were downcast, and she did not turn her head in his direction.

"I have been thinking," said he, "how fatefully we have been brought together! Till a few short months ago we were utter strangers, yet think how inextricably our lives have been linked together. That dear girl, whose parting breath joined us in word and thought, must

surely have realized how strong the bond must prove, cemented, as it has been, by her death."

"Oh, do not speak of her! It wrings my heart to reflect upon what I am, and how basely I have stolen into a home to which I have no claim."

"I think, Alice, that everything that Mary ordered must be right. She had an insight into much that to us seems dark and unfathomable. In the supreme agony of fast-approaching death, I believe it is given to the sufferer to speak with judgment almost more than mortal. Oh, listen to me, Alice! I have so longed to say to you how much I love you!"

"Oh, for pity's sake, say no more! Such words from you are terrible!"

"Terrible! And wherefore? You must have known long ere this how deeply, how devotedly—"

"Mr. Rosston," said the girl, in a voice broken with emotion, "I must ask you to be silent."

"You cannot be so cruel! What harm do we do in speaking of a love like mine—like ours? Oh, let me say like ours!"

"It were madness even to think of it. But stay, Phillip; I do owe you some explanation, because I would not have you think me either cold or false. Were circumstances different, I could say, 'I love you;' but I should be wanting in candor and truth if I said those words now."

"But you can say them—believe me, you can!"

He was very eloquent in his pleading; but she was not to be swayed by his entreaties then.

"You must listen to me. It is for honor's sake. You know me as Alice Maynard. Others know me, alas! by the name of that dear dead girl. I have no claim to either."

"What do you mean?"

"That I do not know my name; that I never knew my parents, and that I am an impostor under a false name, no matter what I may call myself, because I know nothing of who or what I am."

"The dearest girl in the whole world!" he exclaimed, as he attempted to pass his arm around her waist—a movement from which he at once desisted upon a look from her.

"No; there must be no weakness on my part. If I indulged in the hope that some day I might be happy in the love of an honest man, that hope is denied me, for I am without that which the world demands from all who would enter the sacred domestic circle—a family and a name. I have feared this meeting, because—"

"Because what? Speak, Alice!"

"Because I loved you, Phillip. No, no; do not heed that now! I have looked into my heart. You are there enshrined as the only one I can ever love; but I know that I can never wed you."

"Alice, this is to be over-sensitive. Your love sanctifies all. What does it matter to me whence you spring? How does your parentage affect me? As for the world, I despise it!"

"I do not, Phillip, because I must live or perish by its judgment. You, as a man, may almost fearlessly despise many worldly judgments; we poor women must respect them all, or we are lost."

"But I would wed you as Mary Taylor—the name bequeathed to you by one I loved."

"That would be crime upon crime. Oh, no, Philip! do not rob me of my courage. We can never wed!"

"Will you not listen to my entreaties?"

"To what end? That they may change my resolution? You cannot ask me to do that, knowing what I think—remembering what I have said. Let us now go home."

Without another word, she passed her arm through his; and he, scarce knowing what he did, turned and led her away.

He knew that all she had said was true. He knew that her noble womanly instincts were correct and could not be denied, and he also knew that he was an unhappy man.

About this time, the out-of-door population of Asbury became very much interested in the doings of an individual who daily frequented all the public resorts of that fashionable and rather prim watering-place.

He was first noticed by the boatmen, with whom he soon made friends, by his perfect free-and-easy bearing, and by the amusing character of his conversation. They welcomed his coming after his second stroll among them with every mark of pleasure; and although his yarns were sometimes of the toughest, they were narrated with such apparent simplicity that it was impossible to throw any doubt upon their veracity. One or two of the hardier beachmen ventured to demur to a few of his narrations, but they were so overwhelmed with other and more marvelous tales, that they acknowledged their defeat, and became converts to the power of invention possessed by the stranger.

The men and women belonging to the public bath-houses, with whom he also conversed very freely, were equally pleased with him, and it was curious to notice how they abandoned their peculiar industries in the clothes-drying line when they saw him very leisurely strolling toward them, with a huge cigar at an angle of thirty degrees in his mouth, and his hands buried meditatively in his trousers pocket. The individual in question was of such a peculiar type that he might have been put down of any age and of any occupation, or none; he might have been a journalist, a farmer, an engineer, an advertisement agent, a detective or a mere idler.

He was tall and thin, and had a loose, shambling gait, a sallow complexion, with rather prominent cheek-bones, a pair of small, piercing gray eyes, a pleasant mouth, and neither beard nor mustache. He spoke in a clear, rapid manner, and seemed to have visited every quarter of the globe, and was quite at home wherever he found himself. He understood several foreign languages, but never spoke any other than English, and that apparently without any peculiarity of speech which might identify him with any particular locality.

He was very cosmopolitan, and had plenty of assurance, but was not lacking in courtesy of manner or speech.

Two days after Mr. Rosston's interview with Alice, the individual described sauntered on the pier, and when near the sea-end appeared to become deeply interested in the piscatorial pur-

suits of some excursionists who were trying to insnare the wary finny tribe with fine whaling lines and small shark-hooks. Oddly enough, a like interest in the fishing was evinced by Mr. Hewitt as he sat smoking his cigar and inhaling the ozone.

"A very artful game that, isn't it?" said the stranger, edging up close to the smoker.

Mr. Hewitt looked up, took the measure of the speaker with his eye, and perceiving that he was neither a dead-beat nor a peddler, ventured to say:

"Yes, very."

"They ought to read up their sea-fishing a mite. Those lines are big enough to hold a whale or at least a blue-fish, which I consider the finest species of the finny tribe, to be had in perfection only at Newport, Rhode Island. Better than most any other kind, and only excelled in quality by the New Orleans Pomponeau, and that is a morsel fit for the gods."

"You appear to be a bit of a gourmand."

"I am a gourmet, sir; and am not ashamed to own it. A gourmand would eat a whole turkey, stuffed with oysters, at one sitting, while a gourmet would linger over a reed bird as long as the limpid lusciousness held out."

"Pardon my mistake. I see the difference, thanks to your way of putting it."

"Don't mention it; the error is a very common one. I have observed it even in buffalo-hump-eating and in dining off roasted monkeys."

"Roasted monkeys?"

"That surprises you. So it did me, but I soon got used to it. I am not quite so particular since I subsisted four days on the cover of a French dictionary. It saved my life, but did not give me a Parisian accent."

"You have been a traveler?" inquired Mr. Hewitt, much amused and interested.

"I have traveled a 'few.' Yes, I am considerable of a traveler; but I have not yet visited either of the poles."

"The poles?"

"Arctic and Antarctic. Very interesting, I am informed, but rather cold and sloppy. I incline more to the tropics. A roam over the pampas with Guachos—abominable feeders those butchering fellows are!—or a trip up the Amazon are much more agreeable than whaling in Greenland. I tried that once, but infinitely preferred turtle-hunting at Ascension."

"You must have seen a great deal of the world?"

"Yes, considerable; and I hope to see more of it before I pass in my checks."

"Pass in your checks?"

"A Californian mode of alluding to death. It is not considered polite to speak of it in any other way in that awfully healthy country."

"Indeed! And why?"

"Because they say that when people get very old there, and won't die, they make them emigrate. It is the only way to insure elbow-room for the young ones. Ever been on the Pacific?"

"Never!"

"Take my advice—don't go. It is such a

magnificent country, that if you do not admire earth, sky, sea, and the gold-mines, and nature and art at every turn, the inhabitants dislike you. I couldn't keep my rapture up to Frisco mark, and they asked me to 'go East.'

"How very odd!" exclaimed Mr. Hewitt, staring in great amazement at the speaker, uncertain which to admire the more, his mendacity or his fluency; for all was said without a smile upon his face, and with a simplicity of manner perfectly marvelous.

"Ever been in the West, sir?" asked the stranger.

"Never; I intend to go some day. I am told there is good shooting. I am fond of game."

"They have plenty of that, from a grizzly to a 'possum, and no end of prairie chicken, and, in fact, every kind of animal down to a 'skeeter.'

"A 'skeeter'?"

"A mosquito, I should have said. It is one of the creatures, sir, in this world that blows its own horn, very much to the annoyance of other people. Are you staying at a hotel?"

"No; I have rooms in town."

"Ah, a deal more comfortable and much more expensive. Curious people—seaside lodging-house keepers are—very like octopi. Once get within their deadly grasp, and they won't leave you as long as you are worth holding on to."

"Have they ever fleeced you?"

"No; but they have tried. I'm a mere bird—odd bird, you think, I dare say—a mere bird of passage, here to day, gone to-morrow—generally gone to-morrow, though. If ever I stayed long enough in a place to care where I lived, I'd hire a house."

"Just what a friend of mine has done. He's a New York man, and an uncommonly nice fellow. He took a cottage and lives very comfortably that way."

"City man! Perhaps I know him—know most city men worth knowing. Let's see; there's Smith, and Brown, and Rothschild, and Taylor, and—"

"That is the gentleman's name."

"What, Rothschild?"

"No, Taylor. He lives over there."

The stranger followed with his eyes the direction of Mr. Hewitt's index finger, and smiled as he answered:

"Ah, that's it, is it! The Taylor I know is something in the dry-goods business—linen, I believe."

"That is the very gentleman I allude to. But I have never met you there—I mean at his town-house."

"Have you not? Well, that is odd, because if I had been there you ought to have met me. But the fact is, I never was at his house."

"Ah, indeed!" replied Mr. Hewitt, all at once withdrawing every show of cordiality which had been gradually developing itself in him. "Does not visit the house," he thought. "Then he's not up to much"—a conclusion often arrived at, but not always correctly.

The talkative stranger perceived the change of manner in Mr. Hewitt, and as quickly understood the reason. He was not long in answering:

"No, we met abroad—have never had the time to look him up in New York. Met him in Paris—that's no place to meet a friend in—there's so much gadding about that one never gets rest, and rest is what I like."

No one would have thought so to look at him, for he seemed strung upon wires, so excitedly did he move about while talking.

Mr. Hewitt recovered a little of his suavity of manner after this explanation, and deigned to ask the stranger if he was going to remain long in Asbury.

"I really don't know. I wanted to run over to Norway for some fishing or take a tour round the Diamond Fields at the Cape, but perhaps I shall only go up the Nile, and have another peep at the Pyramids, or hunt up Stanley on the Congo."

The listener to such a discursive programme opened his eyes very wide indeed as he looked at this modern Wandering Jew, and he puzzled himself to think what and who he was. The stranger seemed gratified that he had excited Mr. Hewitt's curiosity, for he continued:

"I see you think me a little erratic. Perhaps I am, but I cannot help it. Allow me to present you with my card!" And with these words he gave Mr. Hewitt a neat piece of pasteboard, on which was engraved in German text characters: "Ezra L. Peckham."

"Thanks!" he said, after reading it; and then drawing his own card, he offered it with a smile.

"Cecil Hewitt? I used to know a Hewitt once—met him at Melbourne or Singapore, I really forget which. A most agreeable man—I know he was agreeable, for he saved my life from—yes, from a tiger—therefore it must have been at Singapore. Tigers are very abundant out there. And how is Mr. Taylor?—I hope he is well?"

"Quite well, when I last saw him. He comes down here occasionally. Only his wife and Miss Taylor live here, you know."

"To be sure! His wife and daughter, did you say? I did not know he had a daughter—that is, I didn't remember her."

"Oh, yes, he had a daughter. She came not very long ago from a part of the country you know very well—California."

"Indeed! Oh, yes, of course, now I do remember—she came from Frisco, didn't she?"

"Yes, I think she did—that is to say, I'm sure she did."

"Let me see; a dark girl, isn't she?"

"On the contrary, she has fair hair and blue eyes."

"To be sure! I was thinking of the daughter of the Monte Video Taylor, a banker. Ever been to Monte Video?"

"Never."

"It is not worth going so far to see. I stayed a month there before I went to Madagascar; but I didn't like the place."

"What part of the known world, my dear sir, have you not visited?"

"The poles! I mentioned just now I had never been to either. And how does Miss Taylor like New York?"

"She says very little about it, or any other place."

"Reserved, eh? How singular! Most people who have lived in the West are communicative. I almost caught the habit myself; but I checked it in time. It does not do to say too much. How glad Mrs. Taylor must be to have her daughter back again!"

"But she is not Mrs. Taylor's daughter; she is only her step-daughter."

"To be sure! My memory must be failing me not to remember that. Her step-daughter to be sure, for Mr. Taylor has been twice married. That would make Amanda Mrs. Taylor's step-daughter."

"Amanda? Her name is Mary!"

"Mary, I mean. Are you sure it is Mary?"

"Yes; at any rate that is what they call her."

"And of course they know. It is a wise father that knows his daughter's name, is it not? And so Mary, having returned from California, lives here with her step-mother. How disagreeable that must be for both!"

"On the contrary, they love each other dearly."

"Before company, you mean? Women always do that."

"No; they have a sincere affection for each other, I assure you, and Mary is a most lovable girl."

"Ab, is that the way the wind sits? Excuse me, but a handsome man like yourself cannot help admiring a beautiful woman."

The flattery was not very delicately administered, but Mr. Hewitt accepted it graciously, although, with a sigh, he replied:

"Oh, dear, no! I am not a marrying man; in fact, I shall never marry; but a friend of mine is very much smitten with Miss Taylor, and would be only too glad to marry her if she would have him."

"Why will she not accept him?"

"I do not think—in fact, I know that he has not asked her."

"Is he so bashful?"

"No; Arthur Wildermoss is not afflicted that way; but he is cynical."

"In other words, he's so proud of himself that he despises every one else?"

"If you put it in that way, yes; but there's another reason in the shape of one she prefers."

"This is really interesting. I have such a respect for Mr. Taylor, that anything concerning his household interests me deeply. Whom does she prefer?"

As he said this, Mr. Peckham looked anxiously at Mr. Hewitt, awaiting a reply.

"There's a cousin, you know—Mr. Rosston. He traveled with her from San Francisco, and I suppose the journey developed a sort of attachment to each other."

"And I was forgetting Mr. Rosston all this time; I am sure my memory is failing me. I am really ashamed of being so stupid and dull."

He looked neither dull nor stupid as he said this, but rather sharp and clever. He had not, however, quite done with Mr. Hewitt, and he continued:

"Well, there's no great harm in cousins loving each other, is there? But it is rather hard

on your friend, Mr. Wildermoss. It must be confessed he has not much chance."

"No; that troubles me."

"Troubles you? You are not his brother, or his sister, or his aunt. Why should his disappointment trouble you?"

"Because his temper is so fierce, although few people know it. If he and Rosston were ever to quarrel over the girl, it would be a serious matter."

Mr. Peckham was silent for a moment, as if in thought, and then said:

"If your friend has such a bad temper as that, he'd better take a leaf out of my book, and go upon a little excursion—say to Teneriffe, or to Kabul, or—anywhere!"

"I wish he would, for I do not like the chance of their meeting when Arthur's temper is roused."

"As his friend, my dear sir, I think it is your duty to whisk him off to some place far enough to prevent their meeting. But I see it's getting on for luncheon-time. I hope I shall have the pleasure of meeting you again. Good-morning."

"Good-morning. Glad to have met you!"

When Mr. Peckham turned away, Mr. Hewitt thought him an idle chatterer to allow his private business to be laid bare so easily, and he drew a mental comparison between such levity and his (Hewitt's) own well-governed taciturnity.

CHAPTER X.

MAD FOR LOVE.

As Mr. Peckham walked toward the hotel he laughed quietly to himself at the successful result of his pumping experiment upon Mr. Cecil Hewitt, who had literally stocked him with information without receiving anything but a name upon a card in return.

If Mr. Hewitt was not a marrying man, his sister Adelaide was a marrying woman. She was his junior by several years, and was an attractive girl of the modern type, very fond of dress, of admiration, and very desirous of having an establishment of her own, with a husband on whom she could place her affections, and who would reflect credit upon her choice.

She met her brother on his return to his boarding-place after his interview with the talkative stranger, having secured apartments in the same house.

She was certainly handsome; and as she rose to meet Cecil, and with calm dignity gave him sisterly kiss, even he was impressed with her beauty.

She was a brunette, with well-marked features, graceful carriage, and a reposeful manner, quite in accordance with the rigorous demands for repression of all emotion, which high life imposes.

"My dear Cecil, I am so glad to see you. I feared that I should have been left all alone in this place until dinner-time. How have you been? Mamma sends her love, and is so sorry she cannot come, but you know papa's gout has forced them to go to the mountains. I cannot bear being home alone, so I ran down to spend a few days with you."

"I am delighted to see you, Adelaide; but

was it only sisterly affection that brought you here?"

"What can you mean?" she asked, slightly blushing under his glance.

"I thought you might have had some other attraction to allure you."

"You must really explain yourself, for I am quite unable to guess your meaning."

"Arthur Wildermoss is here. I suppose Jewetson told you; he generally tells you all the news."

"He certainly did tell me Arthur was here, but I do not know that his movements interest me."

"Well, well, I suppose not; but I am glad you have come, for you may be able to direct his somewhat erratic course. I really think he does pay some deference to your opinions."

"You may lay claim to that discovery, for indeed I was not aware of it."

This speech of her brother's afforded her, however, very great satisfaction, for she had long looked upon Mr. Wildermoss as a very desirable person to assume the mastership of that house of hers, which she was so anxious to possess.

She did not love him—that would be too commonplace—but she liked him, and she and her family could not but approve of him, for his social position was undoubted.

The enforced trip of her father and mother gave her the very chance she had seized of quietly looking up Mr. Wildermoss, and she relied upon her brother's assistance in the pleasant task.

Adelaide's visit was not altogether an agreeable one for Mr. Hewitt at this juncture, as he was very much troubled about Arthur's conduct, which did not seem to hold out any immediate prospect of success for his sister's matrimonial projects.

It may seem somewhat unmaidenly on the part of Miss Hewitt to appear to run after any one; but the *beau monde* is very lenient in such cases, and rather approves a little enterprise in affairs of the sort, provided always that they are undertaken and carried out strictly *en règle*.

Miss Hewitt's prospects did not, however, look very bright, although she and Mr. Wildermoss met on the following day upon the pier and exchanged greetings apparently of a very cordial character.

The girl's quick preception saw at a glance how *distract* his manner was, and she could not deny to herself that he had evidently no thought of continuing a flirtation from which she had hoped till now an offer would result.

It was a cruel blow to her vanity, and she at once concluded, woman-like, that a rival had attracted his thoughts.

The intuitive perceptions of the female mind in this and kindred subjects is truly marvelous.

She determined, however, not to yield her purpose without a struggle, and consequently employed her brother, who was really fond of her, to bring Arthur very often into their company. She planned, and Cecil arranged several picnics, drives, excursions and dinners, at which their friend duly attended, although his mind constantly wandered to matters other

than those in which he was supposed to be interested.

But Adelaide Hewitt finally realized that her chance was hopeless, and she began seriously to speak of joining her parents at the Catskills.

Cecil encouraged her views, for he was rapidly becoming fatigued with Arthur's strange behavior.

If anything delayed Miss Hewitt's departure, it was the strong desire she had of becoming acquainted with the unknown rival who had foiled her schemes.

Chance aided her in this wish.

A few days after her preparatory notes of slight from Asbury had been sounded, she and her brother were invited to dine at the Taylors', the head of that house having made arrangements for a few days' continued residence at his sea-side home, and having also provided for Mr. Rosston's absence from the city.

Mr. Jewetson had preceded them, after assuring such of his club friends as he could find in deserted New York, that the Banks, the Stock Exchange, and the centers of trade and finance would have to get on without him for a brief period, and hinting that any hard-up foreign country would have to suspend their monetary negotiations until he got back.

These warnings uttered, the old dandy prepared himself for conquest and enjoyment.

The dinner was eminently successful, if regarded only as a feast. The *chef* from the New York mansion was fully equal to the occasion, and the viands were of the rarest, while the wines were remarkable for variety and value.

Mrs. Taylor was a charming hostess, Mr. Taylor a genial host, and Alice and Phillip aided them in every way to give *éclat* to the entertainment.

In addition to Mr. Wildermoss, Cecil, his sister, and Mr. Jewetson, there were several of the most distinguished personages then resident in Asbury.

The meeting between Adelaide and Alice was unmarked by any outward show of dislike upon the part of the former; while Miss Maynard, anxious to please the sister of Mr. Hewitt, whom she liked, was cordial and sincere in her greeting.

The disappointed girl could not find it in her heart to repulse Alice's friendly overtures, so much was she struck by the open honesty of her manner; and before long they found themselves conversing very affably together.

The fact is, that Adelaide quickly perceived that it was Arthur who loved, or who thought he loved, Miss Maynard; while she seemed totally indifferent to his attentions, which were very marked throughout the evening.

After dinner, the company, encouraged by the fineness of the weather, determined upon an excursion to the shore; so, after the usual ceremonies of cloaking, shawling, and putting on of wraps by the ladies, and the lighting of cigars and cigarettes by the gentlemen, had been completed, they left the house.

Mr. Wildermoss was still constant in his attendance upon Alice, but was much annoyed to

find that Adelaide Hewitt pertinaciously remained by her side, and that, moreover, she managed to retain Phillip near them both.

It may be readily imagined that this arrangement was particularly disagreeable to him, who had counted on having an opportunity of escorting Miss Maynard, and who had in reality determined to make a serious offer of his hand that very night, having, indeed, only accepted the invitation to dinner with that object in view.

He could not get over the mortification he suffered at having been so completely subjugated by the girl's ready tact; and turn the matter in his mind as he might, he felt himself dominated by an unconquerable passion, which, knowing its hopeless character, nearly drove him mad.

The more he struggled against this feeling, the greater hold it appeared to take of him, until at last he felt that to possess her no sacrifice would be too great. Thus loving her, almost to the point of hatred for her greater power of mind, he determined, rather than lose her, to make her Mrs. Wildermoss.

The secret which enveloped her, instead of causing him to hesitate or draw back, seemed to urge him forward.

Once his wife, he would compel her to disclose her history—force her to love him by an adoration on his part almost servile.

What mattered it to him what she was called—whence she came—who she was? If he loved her—if he raised her to the position of Mrs. Wildermoss, would not all be atoned—all forgotten?

The thought of his father, proud old man, obtruded itself: but in his mad love he thrust that aside. Of what account was family pride compared to the possession of such a woman? What cared he if the blood of all the Wildermosses flowed in his veins? If it did, that blue blood was stirred now—and to madness—for love of this adventuress; and as he thought of it, he set his teeth and clinched his hands, almost cursing her for her power over him, exclaiming: "She must be mine!"

Such feelings—so near akin to insanity—made him no very attractive companion to the two young girls, while to Phillip the presence of Arthur was particularly irksome.

The rest of the company who lingered behind Alice and her companions soon after retraced their steps to the house, the night having become very dark by heavy clouds which arose seaward, and soon obscured the moon.

Miss Maynard then perceived that they had gone very far indeed away from the house, and she immediately proposed to return, as she was apprehensive that Mrs. Taylor would be anxious about them.

To the relief of Adelaide, Alice and Phillip, Arthur, no longer hoping for a chance to speak to Alice alone, announced his intention of continuing his walk under some shallow excuse, and constrainedly taking his leave, he walked hastily away, and was soon lost in the darkness.

The others at once retraced their steps, Adelaide leaving Miss Maynard at the door, and going home with her brother, who was waiting for her.

As she and he walked side by side not a word

was exchanged, Miss Hewitt being too busied with her reflections regarding the destruction of her hopes, and in her heart absolving Alice from any wilful share in her disappointment. Cecil was tired, having been much bored by Mr. Jewetson's city talk, which compared unfavorably to the conversation of Mr. Taylor, who never by any chance alluded to business, and he decided that the old dandy was, like many men, most disposed to speak of what he knew least about.

Phillip was not encouraged by Alice's manner to say one word about what was always uppermost in his thoughts, but was inwardly at peace, for he felt that his patience had every hope of being rewarded.

He left her, therefore, after rather a formal good-night, and turned toward the pier, with the intention of taking a walk before going to bed.

He strolled up and down the deserted promenade, wondering much what the future would bring forth, and just as he was upon the point of quitting the place, he found his passage barred by Arthur Wildermoss, whom he believed far off at the time upon the beach.

"One moment, Mr. Rosston, if you please; I want to say a few words to you."

"I am quite at your service."

"May I ask you, Mr. Rosston, if you have known Miss Taylor for any length of time?"

"You may ask that question Mr. Wildermoss, and there is no reason why I should not answer it; but before doing so will you permit me, in return, to ask you why you desire to know?"

Phillip's voice was not raised, nor did his manner betray anything except slight annoyance; yet his interrogator eagerly seized upon such a trifling pretext to reply sharply, and almost rudely, "I do not recognize your right to ask that, but I may say that it is for Miss Taylor's benefit that I should be informed."

Rosston mastered his anger at the tone the other had adopted, and very quietly responded, "I have known Miss Taylor for rather more than four months. I met her first at San Francisco, traveled with her from there to Buffalo, and from Buffalo to this place. Have you any other questions to ask?"

"I have!" was the fierce, abrupt answer. "Do you love her?"

"Mr. Wildermoss, you forget yourself!"

"You think so, do you? Not at all; I do not forget myself, and if ever I should do so, it will be when I remember you!"

His looks, voice, and manner were so offensive that Phillip forbore to reply, fearful of saying anything to compromise Alice, or to still further irritate Arthur, whom he supposed, incorrectly, of course, to be intoxicated.

"You seem to have lost your voice, Mr. Rosston," the excited man remarked. "Or is it only your inability to answer my question that keeps you silent?"

Phillip, disdaining to answer, made a movement to return by the way he had come, but Arthur again barred his passage by standing exactly in front of him; seeing which, Mr. Rosston came also to a stand, yet resolved to keep silence if his patience would endure the trial.

He had not long to wait before it was severely tried by Arthur, who volubly poured forth his reproach and invective.

"I asked you if you loved Miss Taylor, but you have either not sufficient courage to declare your love, or you are cunningly trying to evade my question. But I will have an answer. Do you hear? I will have an answer! Why, man, if she despised you, scorned you, heeded you no more than the dust beneath her feet, you might, if you loved her, be proud to proclaim that love aloud to the whole world!"

"I pray you let me pass," said Phillip, seeing how wildly Arthur looked, and how madly he spoke.

"No; you shall not leave me in doubt as to your sentiments for the lady! Do you think that I will allow you to love her, and—what is ten million times worse—permit her to love you? Why, you would do nothing to prove your love; you would not value the priceless boon of such a love as hers! No, don't speak, for I know what it is to love. Look at me; she hates—despises me, looks on me with contempt, and—oh, dreadful thought!—she pities me! Well, I love her!—I love her, I tell you! Knowing how she loathes the sight of me and the sound of my voice, I love her! I would for her sake, and to win one such smile as she bestows on you, do anything that man dare do! I would sacrifice duty, honor, and life for her! And yet you—you, cold and calculating as you are, dare not tell me that you love her! It is water, not blood, that flows in your veins!"

And he paused for sheer exhaustion.

Again Phillip, making a movement to pass, spoke, although it cost him a mighty effort not to break out into anger with the man who faced him, and whose eyes gleamed in the half-darkness with a demoniac glance upon him.

"I have told you, Mr. Wildermoss, that I will not allow myself to enter into a discussion of any question which, in my opinion, does not become a gentleman to speak of. Good-night."

"I tell you," thundered the other, "that you must listen to me, and you shall!"

"And I say to you," exclaimed Rosston, now thoroughly enraged at the other's pertinacity and insolence, "that I will not hear another word! You shall not drag me into an unseemly quarrel, nor cast a doubt by such a proceeding upon the noblest and best of women! Stand aside, and let me pass!"

A loud derisive laugh was the only answer he received, and as he attempted to move away, Arthur Wildermoss sprung upon and seized him by the throat.

In an instant the dreadful truth flashed upon Phillip that it was a madman whom he had to contend with. If any doubt of this for an instant oppressed him it was resolved by the savage clutch with which the insane man held him.

The dark clouds which had been traveling across the moon seemed to Phillip's senses now to be literally racing—all grew black before his gaze, and he became insensible.

Meanwhile the maniac, for such he was, attempted to drag the man whom he held in his unrelaxing grasp toward the railing of the pier with the full purpose of casting him into the

ocean, which, with the rising winds, beat and dashed and broke in spray with furious might.

He had succeeded in putting the unresisting form close to the edge, when, slipping upon the saturated planks, he himself fell over the rail, and, with an awful yell of foiled revenge and maddened agony, fell into the boiling waves and disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

THE END OF IT ALL.

How long Phillip was insensible he knew not; but he awoke from a heavy sleep to find himself upon a sofa before a blazing fire, with Mr. Ezra Peckham, in his shirt sleeves, looking anxiously at him.

"Where am I?" said Phillip, staring in amazed semi-consciousness around him, and particularly at Mr. Peckham, who, the moment he heard Rosston's voice, laughed heartily, rubbed his hands in glee, and then began furiously to poke the fire.

"Where are you?" he at length said, when he had completed these performances. "Why you're there—right there—upon the sofa in front of a good fire—that's where you are!"

"How did I come here? Where did I come from?"

"Almost out of the jaws of death, young man, that's where you came from! But first, before we get interested in any talking, take a long drink of this!"

"This," which was in a huge tumbler, was a spiced drink of very grateful flavor and of very potent strength; and Phillip, supported by the thoughtful Ezra, after taking a generous draught acknowledged its virtue by immediately declaring that he felt much better.

"That's egg-nogg, a very pretty kind of beverage, and good for almost any complaint. Does it brace you up, and put life into you?"

"It is wonderfully restorative. But tell me—how is it that I am here?"

"Well, I took you off the pier last night, sent for a doctor, and he and I have brought you round—thanks to his giving you nothing but attention, and to my keeping you warm and quiet; those are the best medicines for almost any complaint."

Phillip lay quite still while Mr. Peckham was speaking, and as he thus lay, all that happened came back to his memory. The "good-night" to Alice, the meeting with Wildermoss—he knew it all.

When he had mastered the whole detail in his mind, he turned his eyes upon Mr. Peckham, and that gentleman, rightly guessing the nature of the unspoken question, answered, briefly, "Dead! Fell over the side of the pier trying to throw you into the sea. The body was found the first tide this morning. His friends know all about it; but there'll be no inquest, on account of the family."

Another look of Phillip's was answered with equal promptitude, "Mad as a March hare—mad through love! That's always the worst kind of insanity."

For a long time no word was spoken between Phillip and his friend—the one lost in thought and grief at the untimely end of a man whom

he knew must leave many sorrowing friends behind him, and who, though he had attempted murder, was saved even from reproach by madness. Then he thought with generous kindness of the poor fellow who had gone mad through love for one he loved so dearly.

Mr. Peckham, at last broke the silence by saying, "You don't remember me, do you?"

"I have been looking at you, and it seems to me we have met before?"

"Where?"

"In Illinois—at the town of Cairo, where the Mississippi and Ohio rivers commingle."

"At a trial concerning some goods lost on their way to San Francisco—"

"Consigned to Taylor Brothers of that city. You've guessed right this time, too."

"You were on our side."

"I was, and I am happy to say I won the case. How do you do?"

And Mr. Peckham rose and formally shook hands with Phillip.

"Well, it is a lucky chance that I am here at Asbury this very minute—that is, lucky for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Are you strong enough to hear a little news? Take another sip of egg-nogg. No? That's all right. Then listen!"

"I am strong enough to hear anything now—I am almost well."

"That's hearty! Well, the old lady knows all!"

Phillip sat bolt upright on the sofa, and stared at Mr. Peckham to see if he had also gone mad; but that gentleman having resumed his whittling, continued, without noticing Rosston's astonishment, "The old lady knows all. This is how it is. I have been up to Mr. Taylor's house, have seen Mrs. Taylor, told her about the property in Tennessee left by her late husband—shot as a spy, although he wasn't one—and she's well fixed as regards cash for the rest of her days."

"But I never knew that Mrs. Taylor had a first husband."

"No more did your uncle. It was a marriage contracted hastily when she was on a visit from New York State to a sister living in Nashville. The man she married was a wealthy planter, who fell head-over-heels in love with her at first sight. They were as happy as man and wife could be until the Rebellion broke out, and he went on the Union side of the question. Well, that riled his relations, who were all high-toned Southerners; and when he was shot by a lot of blackguard guerrillas they swore he was a traitor, and that his property had been confiscated to the Federals, to keep her from getting it."

"You amaze me!"

"Not more than I amazed Mrs. Taylor, I reckon; but we both agreed to say nothing about Mr. Destouches—that was her first husband's name—for that and other reasons."

"Other reasons?"

"Yes; one of them concerns Miss Mary."

Phillip started, and was on the point of saying something to divert the conversation until he could recover his presence of mind; but Mr. Peckham, in the most business-like way, proceeded:

"When I say Miss Mary, of course I mean Miss Alice Maynard, I know all about it—pumped the old nurse after I had pumped Mr. Cecil Hewitt, and it wasn't five minutes before I scented out the whole plot. It was an innocent kind of one, after all; but it might have turned out an awkward affair if I hadn't found out who Alice Maynard really was."

Phillip lay back in speechless wonderment listening to this Mr. Peckham, the Illinois lawyer, laying bare the secrets of a New York home at a New York fireside.

It was amazing! But when he spoke of Alice Maynard in the way he did, Phillip felt hot and cold by turns, and could scarcely whisper, "For heaven's sake, tell me all!"

"Just what I am about to do; but keep quiet, or I shall have to telephone for the doctor. Well, the long and short of it is, that when you brought Alice Maynard, as you thought her, to your uncle's house to be loved by him as his daughter, you were bringing Annette Destouches right straight into her mother's arms. That was another plot of her father's precious relatives. They stole her child, put her under charge of old Jake Maynard, a Missouri farmer, and pretended to Mrs. Destouches that she had been lost during the war. They did that so that neither mother nor daughter should ever claim the property. Artful, wasn't it? But I reckon they'll have to own up now, for we've got a clear record of the nefarious scheme, thanks to some inquiries which that good old soul, Professor Van Oppen, started before he died, and which we coaxed out of his widow's hands and completed up to date. What d'ye think of it all?"

Phillip didn't just then know what to think, so he said nothing; but sat looking at Mr. Peckham, who went on:

"I needn't tell you that was good news for Annette, alias Alice, alias Mary. She was the happiest girl I ever saw, and she fairly laughed and fainted and cried for happiness when Mrs. Taylor had her in her arms, all right now."

"And this all occurred—"

"Not two hours ago, while you were lying there in a sort of uneasy sleep, with the doctor holding on to your pulse so that you shouldn't slip through his fingers. I had to hurry up the news to the old lady, for fear you might take the wrong turning between life and death."

"You are indeed a kind friend!"

"Wait until you see my bill of costs before you say that; but there! I know. I'm all right upon the dollars and cents question; but I've not told you all."

"Every word you utter is full of wonder."

"That's very complimentary; but, mind, this is all in the way of business, for I and my partner are the agents for the Destouches Estate, and we shall make a good thing out of all this. But now for the sentimental part of my brief. After Mrs. Taylor and Miss Annette had kissed and hugged each other as only a mother and a daughter can do, and after they had shed lots of tears of joy, as only women-folks can do, they both thought that it would be cruel to undeceive Mr. Taylor about her not being Mary after all, since the old gentleman had got to love her so much. So they are not going to tell him

anything, except that I found a fortune for his wife; that won't displease him. We are to say nothing about that first husband, and we are not going to make Miss Annette out to be a Destouches, but leave her for your old uncle to love and caress as Mary Taylor, provided—

"What?"

"That you consent!" said a pretty, gentle voice; and in another moment Annette Destouches was clasped in Phillip's arms, while Mrs. Taylor, radiant with happiness, stood contemplating them.

And it was so settled.

For many months old Mr. Taylor enjoyed the society of the good, amiable girl whom he believed to be his Mary; and even when she left him to become Mrs. Phillip Rosston, his heart was not broken, for he often had her and her husband's society.

Mrs. Taylor seemed, when the trouble and suspense of the past had been lifted, to gather new life, and her existence was doubly blessed in the secret love of a daughter, and the thorough esteem of a husband, whom she now rightly appreciated.

Miss Adelaide Hewitt did eventually secure a rich and aristocratic husband; and the house she had pictured so often to herself was established, and there the Taylors and Mr. and Mrs. Rosston were always welcome visitors.

Cecil Hewitt still declares that he is not a marrying man; but a certain Miss Blanche Underwood is very much in his thoughts.

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